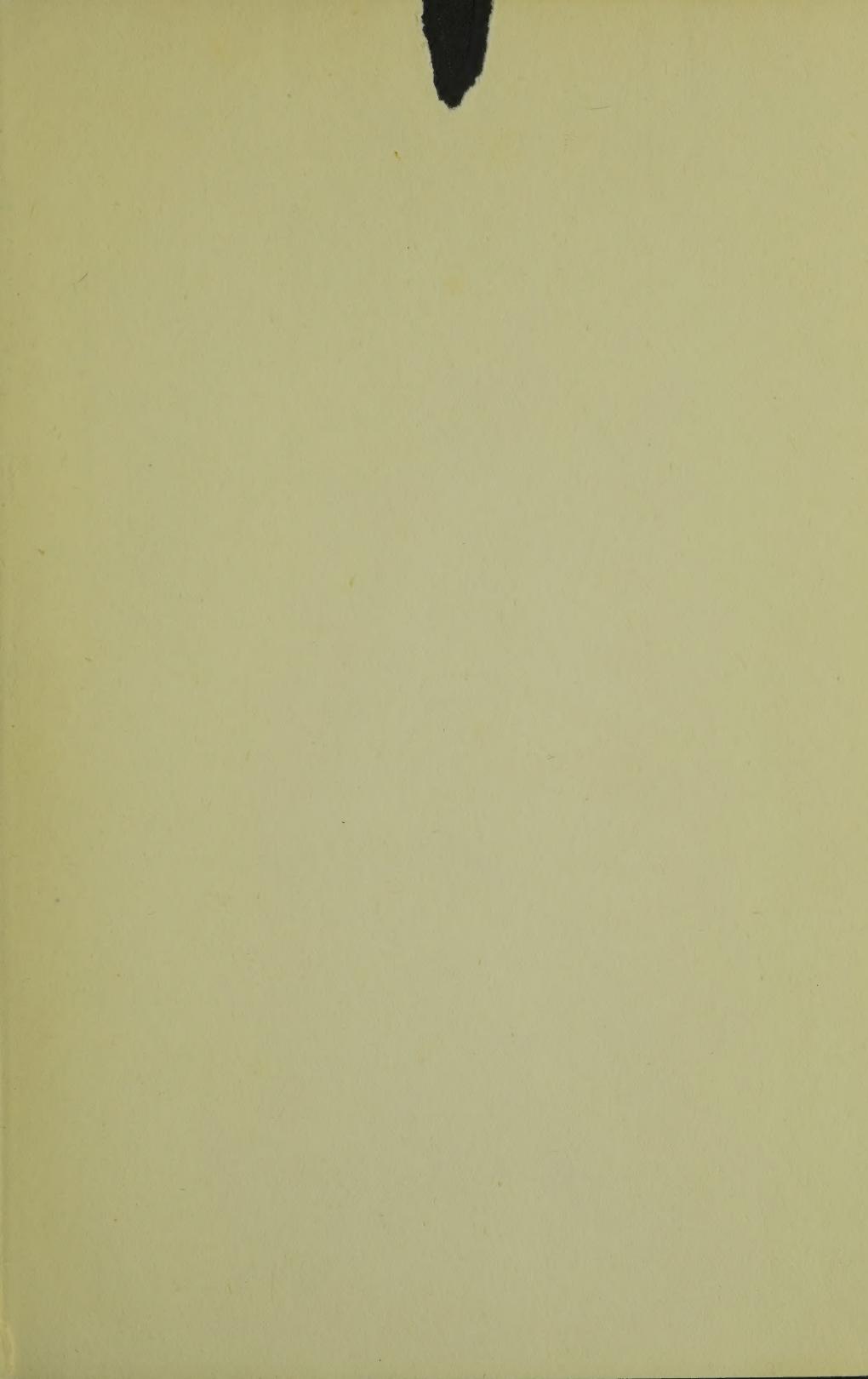
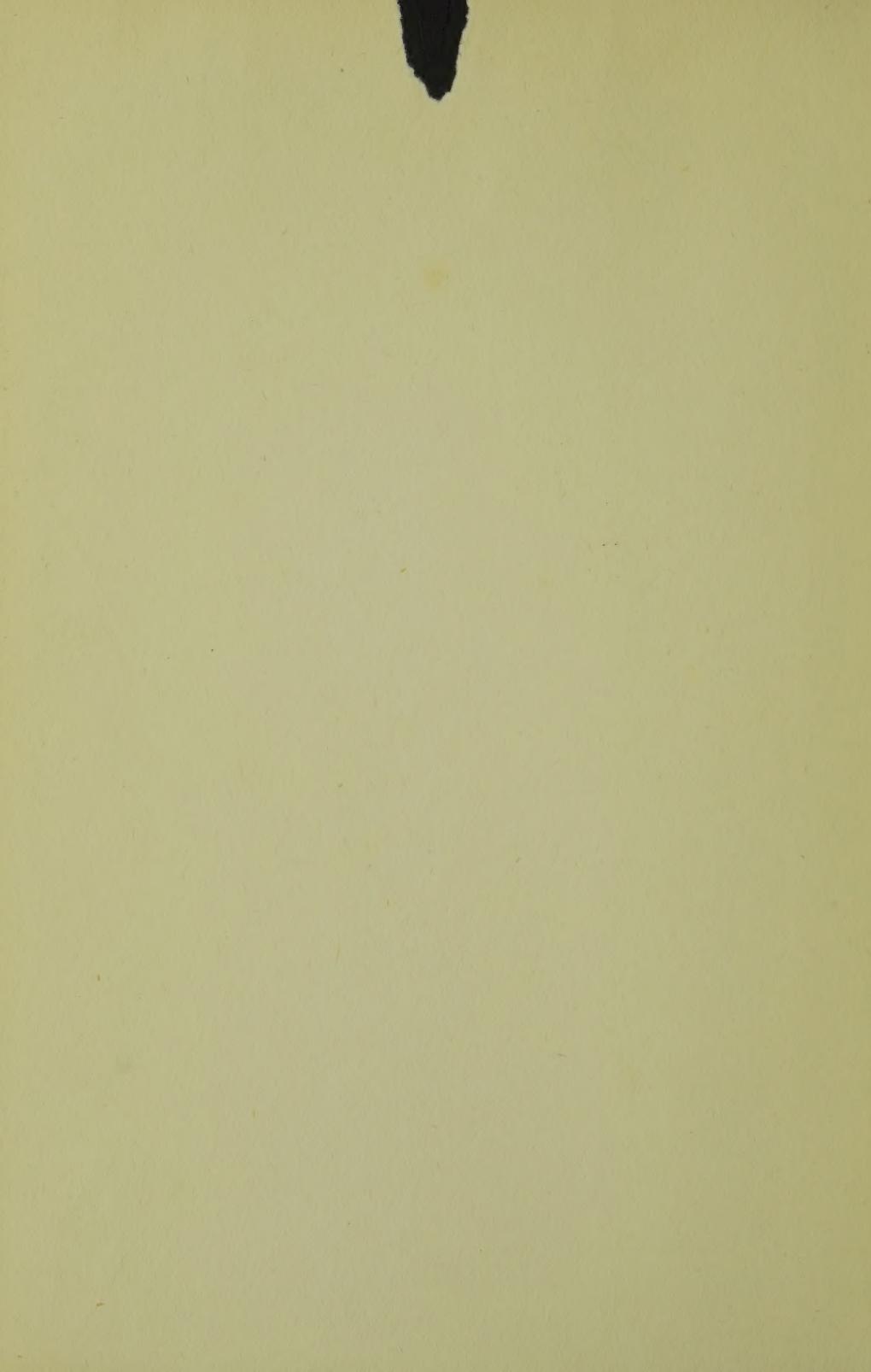


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BY ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

MR. DICKENS GOES TO THE PLAY

ENCHANTED AISLES

IRVING BERLIN



IRVING BERLIN

A DRAWING BY NEYSA MCMEIN

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THE STORY OF IRVING BERLIN

BY
ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

AUTHOR OF "ENCHANTED AISLES," ETC.

WITH 16 ILLUSTRATIONS
PORTRAIT BY NEYSA McMEIN

G.P. Putnam's Sons
New York & London
The Knickerbocker Press
1925

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by
Alexander Woollcott



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To SAM H. HARRIS

I inscribe this book, not only out of my own deep respect for him but in the knowledge that, had Berlin chosen to tell his own story, that book, too, would have been dedicated

To SAM H. HARRIS

The Author.

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The Story of Irving Berlin

The Story of Irving Berlin

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING IZZY BALINE

IT was a sweltering summer afternoon in the middle nineties—the loitering nineties when a veteran of the Civil War could still be President in Washington and the skirts of American womanhood still swept up the dust of our avenues.

A dirty, little, barefoot newsboy, already well enough known to the rival gangs of Cherry Street as Izzy Baline, stood on the edge of an East River pier, there where Cherry Hill slopes down to the New York waterfront. It was his immediate mission in life to sell the *Evening Journal*, a gaudy gazette then adventuring for the first time in those howling headlines of which the new vehemence was serving so well to usher in the war with far-off Spain. A discouragingly large number of copies rested still

unsold under his skinny right arm. But, firmly clutched in the damp grasp of his left hand, five sticky pennies bore witness to at least some business done on this, his first day as a newsboy.

For a moment he had forgotten the dreary need of selling the remainder. For his large, dark eyes were happily occupied with a black and reeking ship which the waterfront tattle reported as about to set sail for an incredibly distant place called China. Over her rails there peered an occasional yellow face, just such a funny, yellow face as looked out at him from the windows over by the Bowery when he scuttled by on his way to Chambers Street, where, it seemed, he could get the papers which an absurdly ordered world then expected him to sell at a monstrous profit to passing strangers. It was pleasant to forget their almost universal indifference to *Evening Journals* in gazing at this craft which would soon put out for the mysterious East.

Indeed, she proved so engaging a spectacle that the boy paid little heed to a crane which had been doggedly swinging to and fro all afternoon between a nearby coal barge and a row of carts waiting on the pier to carry its cargo to the cellars of the city.

Thus the returning crane was able to catch him, sweep him through the air and drop him into the deep water of the East River which swirls littered and greasy there between the Manhattan piers.

There was laughter and shrill clamor along the rails of the big ship. There was much conscientious calling for the police along the bustling pier. But it was an Irish wharf rat of no official standing who parted recklessly with his shoes and jumped in after the small merchant. Afterwards the ambulance surgeon confided to the nurse in Gouverneur Hospital that the kid must have gone down for the third time, there was so much of the East River inside him. The newspapers were doubtless drifting sogily out to sea by this time, but some of Mr. Hearst's more emphatic tidings could have been read by anyone who had held Izzy Baline's shirt up to a mirror. And, as they stretched him out on a cot in the hospital, they laughed at discovering that his clenched left hand still held all five of the pennies.

That circumstance suggests ominously that this newsboy was a magnate in the making. But after all it was not thrift nor shrewdness nor any talent for business which finally made a name for him.

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In these weapons, so often forged in the furnace of the Ghetto, his arsenal is passing poor. It so happens that he had quite another gift—a gift of inexhaustible melody and, in the way she has, America found it out. To him, above all others of his day, a youngster carried out of Russia in the hold of a ship and pitched into the swarm of struggling life in the lower East Side, it was given so to catch the rhythm of his land and time that the whole world has jogged along to the measures of his songs. And tunes of his have traveled further than ever the ship he watched loading for China that afternoon thirty years ago. It was this gift which made a name for him. And the name is not Israel Baline. You know him as Irving Berlin.

This is his story. As it is written here, it will be left to you to guess by what alchemy he transmuted into music the jumbled sounds of his life—the wash of the river against the blackened piers, the alarms of the street cars, the roar of the elevated, the frightening scream of the fire engines, the polyglot hubbub of the curbs and doorsteps of his own East Side, the brassy jangle of the hurdy-gurdies, the cries of the fruit venders and push cart peddlers, the chants in

Introducing Izzy Baline

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the synagogues, the whines and squeals of Chinatown, the clink of glass and the crack of revolvers in saloons along the Bowery, above all the plaintive race notes, the wail of his sorrowing tribe, the lamentation of a people harried and self-pitying since time out of mind.

CHAPTER II

CHERRY STREET

LIKE Jascha Heifetz, Irving Berlin is a Russian Jew. When, as sometimes happens nowadays, the two of them come together in the corner of some lackadaisical studio for a holiday hour over the keyboard, it is the meeting of two paths that once long ago lay not so far apart. The onlooker, in the midst of his amusement at the intricacies of syncopation which four truant hands may achieve, can hardly help reflecting on the divergence of those paths, on the difference in the channels by which the music that was in each boy found its way out.

When Heifetz was the age of that urchin whom the crane knocked into the East River, he was toiling eight and ten hours a day over his violin and piano lessons. Marked in his Russian cradle for a virtuoso, he was guarded like a latter day ark of the covenant—an ark that was borne overseas to

America at last because art flows unerringly to whatever land hoards the gold of the world. One who has seen Heifetz in the Pyrenees spending an afternoon gleefully shying stones at an unoffending tree can guess what kind of dreary, treadmill childhood the world must compensate him for now that lessons are over. What music Berlin knows, he learned on the sidewalks of New York. It seems to have been the school of schools for him.

Of the Russia he left behind when he was four years old, he now remembers nothing save the excitement of one terrifying night when he lay on a blanket beside a road and saw the darkness shrinking back from the flames of his burning home. All his village was ashes by daylight. Of the voyage to America he remembers nothing save the bunks below decks on which he and his folks were shelved. To this day a scar on his forehead is a souvenir of the penknife that dropped on him from the bunk above the one on which he had been deposited.

It was a refugee rabbi and his household that fled from village to village and finally came to America in 1892. Israel was the youngest of eight. They touched New York at the Battery. It was in

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the days before Ellis Island and before the regrettable gates swung to in the face of the wistful migration. At least the narrowing quota law is a source of regret to two groups among us. There are those who are loath to see America growing cautious and gingerly with its measureless abundance. And there are those who feel that our curious democracy is less subject to embarrassing scrutiny so long as it is steadily supplied each year with a fresh set of unquestioning drudges to do its kitchen police.

For such work the tribe of Baline was marked. There were dismal tenements and ghetto sweatshops awaiting them behind that famous skyline which glistened opalescent in the morning sunlight. A kinsman, duly apprised of their advent, had sent a lumbering truck down to the landing to transport them and their baggage to the waiting basement in Monroe Street which was to be their first home in the new land. The baggage was such odds and ends of clothing and furniture and frying pans as had been hauled from the flames when the house was burned in Russia. Of course there was a feather bed, a big, soft mattress into the depths of which a small boy could sink out of sight as into the East River.

It was such a one as the bride's folks always provide when a Jewish girl is married in Russia. Mrs. Baline had issued her eight children into an unwelcoming world from that bed and she did not propose to set up housekeeping in America without it.

The first greeting to the apprehensive newcomers was not amiable. It seldom is. Your settler no sooner finds his way about in a new land than he turns and scowls at those coming after him. The hazing of Freshmen is always attended to by the *nouveaux riches* Sophomores. It is never the grizzled oldtimers in an army camp who are most contemptuous of the rookies. The history of America could be written in terms of the scorn which each wave of immigration has heaped on its immediate successor. Consider the instance of the father of the four Marx Brothers who came indignantly to this country when the thralldom of Alsace-Lorraine was new. He alighted at the Battery and walked up Broadway wearing a high green hat. This jaunty but unfamiliar headpiece proved displeasing to a passing resident whose disapproval took the form of vegetables. A tomato was his criticism. The outraged newcomer, feeling a decent resentment at such destructive

comment, gave chase and finally ran the critic down. Something pretty satisfying in the way of Alsatian "revanche" would then and there have been exacted had not the newcomer recognized, just in time at this close range, that his captive was a cousin who had but recently preceded him to the land of opportunity.

Thus it is ever. And the Baline children, peering shyly over the edge of their chariot as it clattered over the cobblestones of the Battery, were greeted by jeering crowds of children whose brogues and garbs suggested that they themselves had scarcely got the salt air of their own sea voyage out of their lungs. Yet their jeer of jeers was "Greenhorn! Greenhorn! Oh, Gee, look at the ole greenhorns!"

The old greenhorns and the young greenhorns were distributed through the three compartments of that Monroe Street basement in whatever of space was left after the necessary preëmptions for eating and cooking. It was only when the Balines had begun to adjust themselves to the economic schemes of things and the first wages were dribbling in that they moved to a slightly airier tenement around the corner in Cherry Street.



MRS. BALINE

There were six children in this home. The eldest son had remained behind in Russia and the eldest daughter had married. The four younger girls were soon bent over bead work by what little light could filter down through the basement windows. The middle brother became at once a faithful hustler in the sweatshops of the quarter. At times, the entire household sold papers on the street. Izzy, the youngest, was at first too young to send forth on such enterprises. Then, and for a long time thereafter, he was regarded as a total loss.

The father found irregular work as one competent to certify to the kosher meat in the butcher shops. At the approach of Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur he toiled also as a choir master. For in Russia, the elder Baline had been a cantor, like his grandfather and his great-grandfather before him. And since his youngest was his last chance, he was grimly determined that his Israel should somehow fall heir to this legacy of piety and sweet sound.

The boy had a clear, true soprano voice—a plaintive voice tuned to the grieving of the *schule*, the same instrument for woeful chant with which two of his contemporaries have sung their way into the

favor of their generation, one under the name of Eddie Cantor and the other under the name of Al Jolson. Like Berlin, Jolson is the son of a cantor. He too learned to walk in a far-off Russian village and he too found the way to Broadway by the route of the honkey tonks.

Within the narrow limits of Talmudic learning, the elder Baline was a scholarly fellow and his Israel's blundering woolly-witted hoplessness at the devotional lessons aroused all his wrath and his despair. But he had great hopes of the boy's future as a cantor and especially in the year when the youngest was going to *cheder* in preparation for his *bar mitzvah*, the frail transplanted rabbi spent his strength training this small son's voice for the music which is the plaint of a homeless people to the great Jehovah.

He was only eight when his father died and his mother became in name what truly she had always been—the head of the family. She was an austere and pious and heavily burdened woman, who held the purse and cooked the food for all her tribe. She never learned the speech or the folkways of the new land to which she had come, nor dreamed what was going on in the turbulent world around her. She

had no time for that world. Hers was a hungry brood and later she was busy playing midwife and general help when three sets of grandchildren came to bend her patient back further.

The world grew easier for her when, to her surprise and inner amusement, this absurd new country began to pay handsomely for the songs her youngest wrote. The songs themselves did not greatly interest her and it was not until the war that she consented to make the journey to a theater to hear him sing one of them. That was the soldier show which Sergeant Berlin wrote between taps and reveille at Camp Upton. On the vast Century stage, she saw him crouched small and forlorn over the scrubbing pail of the kitchen police. It was a tiny figure set in a very arena of beribboned generals pleasingly mingled for that evening with the *haute noblesse* of Broadway. When the thin sweet thread of song trailed its way to the end of the plaintive refrain which began:

“Poor little me
I’m a K. P.”

there was one of those roaring responses which come but once in a blue moon and warm a minstrel’s

heart beyond all telling. Probably that was Irving Berlin's most exultant night and such was the buoyant cheering that an onlooker had the illusion of a small troubadour being lifted onto the fond and delighted shoulders of the mob. But to the troubadour's mother, in her innocent literalness, the dejection of the song spoke too clearly and she went home to her rocking-chair in the Bronx oppressed with the feeling that somehow New York was picking on her youngest.

That rocking-chair was part of the stiff and ugly set which he had bought for her on the instalment plan when his first royalties came in. If you ever bought a copy of such ribald and undomestic ditties as "My Wife's Gone to the Country," or "Call Me Up Some Rainy Afternoon," you helped pay for that chair. Mrs. Baline would never have another and when money began to pour in so abundantly that she might have had a palace and moved grandly from throne to throne, she grew stubborn about the shiny rocker and would not have it supplanted while she lived. Now her daughter cherishes it in memory of her.

The chair represented rest which came at last

in the late afternoon of a life of hardship. It was the hardship that has been the portion of all the pioneer women since the first settlers pushed their way into the American wilderness. If for those who came last there were no trees to fell nor ground to break, there was, in all conscience, toil as great of another sort. If there were no savages peering hostile into their poor little clearing, there were other dangers of another kind of wilderness that pressed close all around—dangers shrewdly scented by the Jewish fathers and mothers who came in the final migration and who therefore guarded with all the sterner hand the broods they brought with them into the new world. Yet in our time we have all read tales of the lower East Side written by men who seemed quite unaware that in the swarming tenements of its meanest street there were homes as strong in love and goodness as any one could find behind the green lawns and white pickets of a New England village.

For a long time the Balines were as poor as a family can be, and, if there was to be food enough to go round, each child had to be counted on for some of it. It was the tribal custom for each of them to

bring back and deposit in the mother's lap at sun-down whatever silver had been earned that day by collars sewn, errands run, beads strung, or papers sold. The reason the young Israel's fist never gave up the pennies that day even at the bottom of the East River was because the boy had no impulse half so strong as his deep sense of the need of money in the tenement in Cherry Street, no embarrassment half so scalding as the knowledge that of all the contributions to the family war chest, his were always the smallest and the most irregular. Those pennies were due in the lap of his mother's apron. Therefore, even while drowning, he could hardly be expected to let go of them.

The meagerness of his own contributions was less a matter of mark during the few years while he was still sidling reluctantly to school—just such a multitudinous East Side school as the one in which Myra Kelly gathered her moving legends of the Ghetto children. But even then he shirked the opportunities of the free hours and gave his first loyalty rather to the hot war of the Cherry Street gangs. Their battles were not infrequently marked by bloodletting, the military tactics of the stone age

and an occasional atavistic return to mayhem. And they aroused the same passionate loyalty which, in other strata of American life, is drained off by Lawrenceville and Andover. It is worth noting in these more troubled days that the wars were never race wars and only on great occasions, such as the holy eve of All Saints' Day, did the affable and reasonably tolerant Irish kids of Cherry Hill feel moved to pluck the Jewish boys from the doorsteps and drop them into the East River. That was how Izzy Baline and many of his contemporaries learned to swim. In time he became both ambitious and amphibious enough to swim as far as Brooklyn. An added peril of the deep was the danger that the cops would pinch you for making so public an appearance in a no-piece bathing-suit. You hid your clothes under the pier in your own particular nook which you called your parlor. And sometimes, wet and shivering, you had to wait on the Brooklyn side for the coming of dark because the constabulary of the home shore was on the prowl. Of the old gang, his heroes and chieftains and companions-at-arms are scattered now to the ends of the earth. Some have remained in Cherry Street.

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Some live in Riverside Drive and employ the children of those who remained in Cherry Street. And others are buried on a hillside northwest of a town in France called Verdun.

It is something of a temptation to Berlin's biographer to suggest artfully that in the days when he dodged the drudgery of selling papers and toting telegrams, it was because he knew in his heart he was made for better things. But it would take a quite shameless historian to go back and thus discover aspiration stirring in the head of the little Baline tyke who sat nursing his thin knees on the tenement doorstep. You would be wrong if you imagined his suspecting for one instant that that head of his was the home of a thousand tunes. Or if you conceived him gazing dreamily into the future and saying: "Some day I will write 'Alexander's Ragtime Band' and then they'll be sorry." Most of us move by uncalculated tangents. We carom across the board of life and if we win, it is usually by the accident of blind, panic-stricken flight.

It was really such a flight that started the Baline boy on his course out of Cherry Street by Chinatown to Broadway and the Strand. As far as he



AN IMPROMPTU CONCERT WITH JASCHA HEIFETZ

knew, there was always enough to eat stewing away on the back of Mother Baline's stove. At least there was always enough for him. But, he knew, too, that he contributed less than the least of his sisters and that skeptical eyes were being turned on him as his legs lengthened and his earning power remained the same. He was sick with a sense of his own worthlessness. He was a misfit and he knew it and he suffered intolerably. Finally, in a miserable retreat from reproaches unspoken, he cleared out one evening after supper, vaguely bent on fending for himself or starving if he failed. In the idiom of his neighborhood, where the phenomenon was not uncommon, he went on the bum.

To the matriarch of a Jewish home like that one in Cherry Street, such a vagrancy was a thing of shame to be kept from the neighbors as long as possible. When, every now and again in the first few weeks of that vagrancy, a neighbor's kid would shrilly impart the news that her Izzy had been seen at this point or that along the Bowery, she would finish the day's work by trudging painfully to that mystifying and tumultuous crossroads in the vain hope of catching sight of him. Probably you can

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picture her standing there many a night on the edge of the unheeding procession, a shawl over her bewildered head, her anxious eyes peering ceaselessly and without reward.

When, long afterwards, he stood again in her doorway, she welcomed him with open arms. And with no reproaches. There never were any. Even when he came to her at last with the news that he was to marry a girl from among the Gentiles, there were no reproaches. Perhaps she could keep silent in the face of such a violation of her most sacred creed because of a feeling that after all, his way, whatever it might be, was one he had made for himself and that as the tribe had not been able to help him in the beginning, so it might not rule him now. Probably her heart was more than a little wrung. But she was too loving and too gallant to let her son suspect it.

That, however, was years later. He was only a boy of fourteen when he went on the bum.

CHAPTER III

THE BOWERY

It was to the Bowery that the runaway's feet turned—then as now the Great White Way of the lower East Side. It was gaudy and mysterious and adult and he went to it with his eyes wide and his heart in his mouth. And because he would need at least ten cents to buy himself a bed for the night in one of the blowsy dormitories of the region, his first project was to sidle through the swinging doors of some cheerful saloon, lift his voice in a woeful ballad of the day and see what pennies would shower on the floor around him. Wherefore a little later the beer-drinkers at Callahan's that night were deeply affected by an unsolicited rendition of a sour song entitled "The Mansion of Aching Hearts." It was not long before the nervous minstrel had enough to buy himself a lodging for the night.

But the sense that he was a loose-liver and so close

to the park benches as to be quite truly on the bum was so strong in him that when the dingy register was thrust towards him, he scrawled a bogus name on its fly-blown page. For reasons now forgotten, he chanced to use the name of a young actress who was shortly to appear in a play of and for the Bowery, a fearful melodrama called "From Rags to Riches," in which a Bowery girl turned out to be the rightful heiress to a mansion on Fifth Avenue. The name which Master Baline chose as suitable for a young desperado on the bum was selected without a conspicuous regard for the inherent probabilities. For the name was Cooney. It was doubtless only a coincidence that this actress to whom it belonged dropped it shortly thereafter. You know her now as Laurette Taylor.

That first venture as a hungry troubadour in quest of shelter started Irving Berlin on his career as a busker of the Bowery. It was inevitable that he should have tried his luck first as a wandering minstrel, because such mild and intermittent success in breadwinning as he had already tasted was all due to his voice. For instance, there had been a quite regular weekly income of fifty cents for sing-

ing of a Saturday night at MacAlear's down by the waterfront. And once in the chorus of a musical show—Ed Rice's "The Show Girl"—he had got as far as Binghamton, N. Y., before he was fired. And again he had journeyed to Tin Pan Alley, of which he was later to be the joy and pride and flower. There in the office of Harry von Tilzer, the music publisher, he had been given the job of plugging a song from the balcony of Tony Pastor's music hall in Fourteenth Street, just as it had been one of his tasks in "The Show Girl" to hurry around front and sing the chorus of "Sammie" from one of the boxes.

If you are a vaudeville patron, you have often heard some one rise in the balcony and sing the refrain of a song that had just been sung on the stage. This impetuous warbling is sometimes managed in a quite spontaneous and impromptu manner. Indeed, if you are not quite bright, you think that such volunteered singing is just the impulse of some lark who cannot resist bursting into the chorus of so infectious a melody. This time the lark was engaged at a salary of \$5 a week to encourage in this manner a song that was being introduced during the act of the Three—Keatons—

Three. There was Ma Keaton, ample and gorgeous, who played the saxophone at full tilt. There was Pa Keaton who obliged with genteel comedy. And there was their patient offspring who was tossed around by his parents and even bounced against the scenery in a most entertaining manner. This combination of offspring and missile has since come up in the world. He is a wild comic of the screen known the world around as Buster Keaton. His antics are now converted into celluloid on so large a scale that they have incorporated him. It is (or was) possible to own shares of Buster. And something of the inevitable pattern of this narrative becomes visible when you learn that a large number of those shares are in the strong box of the boy who sang in the balcony at Tony Pastor's long ago.

For that boy, therefore, the Bowery was chiefly glamorous as a field for minstrelsy. He went in for busking. If you look in the dictionary, you will see that the verb "to busk" still recalls the time in Chaucer's England when it meant "to offer goods or entertainment in public houses." The motley wear, the quaint inns, the sun-dappled lanes and the hawthorne hedges of Merrie England have vanished

from its associations, but twenty years ago, at any rate, the customs of these wandering minstrels and the very idiom of their guild survived on the Bowery as they survive today in the "concert parties" of the English towns. They still called it busking. The buskers were the American cousins of the comedians you see on the *terrasses* of the boulevard cafés in Paris or on the sidewalks outside the London theaters when the line is forming for the pit. The idle drinker in Paris and the patient playgoer in London are both entertained by floating gentry who will sing songs, swallow flames or swords, and perform prodigies of sleight-of-hand, all on the chance of a few stray coppers. Thus the buskers.

In twos and threes they would appear in the bar-rooms and dance-halls of the Bowery and, in the words of Master Balieff, "sink sat sonks" until the patrons wept and showered down the pennies they had vaguely intended for investment in more beer. The singers would pick up their income from the sawdust. They would pick up their repertory in the offices of Tin Pan Alley, just as now Irving Berlin's own offices are daily turbulent with the youngsters who have come to learn his latest songs

for use in the halls of the two-a-day. Or perhaps they would wing a new tune in its flight from the hurdy-gurdies. Or capture its refrain from a vantage point in the gallery of the Thalia. That was the newer and gaudier name of the old Bowery Theater which had trembled in its time with so much fine bosom-beating histrionism before the celebrated decline of the stage set in. The Thalia is just another name for the theater built on the site of the Bull's Head Tavern where General Washington and his officers used to stop for their hot toddy.

The most gracious friend of the buskers was Chuck Connors. He was the derelict Cockney informally but universally recognized as the Mayor of Chinatown. On an intermittent income earned as a guide to Chinatown, he reigned over the conglomerate neighborhood from his ratty house in Doyer Street across the way from the interminable whine of the Chinese Theater. He lived with his sister and his boon companion was a retired and extremely reminiscent old garroter and river thief whose tales were all of the good old days when the name of the Five Points was enough to send chills up the householding spines of Manhattan.

In Chuck's little brown derby and short, green jacket with large buttons, there was a lingering accent of Whitechapel. And when in his cups, he too, would sing. He would sing ballads of the old Kent Road. But for the most part the evening's supply of grog merely induced in him a mild sense of well-being, a faint delusion of grandeur when he would fancy himself as a patron and arbiter of the arts, the only one in the Bowery competent to decide which of the neophyte buskers should find favor on the Bowery and which would better drop art for laying bricks or picking pockets.

Chuck's chief animosity was reserved for Steve Brodie, the retired pugilist whose odd way of recapturing public attention was to fling himself from the Brooklyn Bridge. In these days, Brodie had a saloon in the Bowery and it was a regular stand in the circuit of the buskers. Then, of course, there was the Morgue, as the bar-room at 25 Bowery was so delightfully called. And McKeon's across the way at No. 20.

Chief of the buskers was Blind Sol, a sightless minstrel whom one of the neophytes was always glad to lead from barroom to barroom because old

Sol's prop could pass unquestioned through all the doors of that somewhat suspicious neighborhood. More often it was one of the street-walkers of the neighborhood who would take a night off and establish a drawing account with Saint Peter by serving as guide for the blind singer. For his first ventures as a busker, the small runaway from Cherry Hill turned himself into a shabby Lord Fauntleroy for this battered Dorincourt and trudged from saloon to saloon with the lean hand of Blind Sol clamped to his shoulder. Thus he himself became known and though he aways had to split his takings with the piano player in each place, he would usually have as much as fifty cents jingling in his pocket by the time dawn had crossed the East River.

On such an income you could buy yourself a roof and a quite regular supply of food. The roof, no doubt, was one you had to share with a good many of your fellow citizens. But then the residents of Cherry Street are not pampered in this matter. Besides, if you had fifteen cents you could have a room to yourself, and if you had a quarter you could wallow in the extra luxury of sheets. The bed, to be sure, was occasionally verminous and the bath-

ing facilities were not calculated to arouse enthusiasm. Indeed, your bath, if any, was obtained in the boiler room of the basement, but there was also a place there where you could wash your shirt and wait for it to dry by the heat of the furnace, all of which made for convenience and economy.

Even the meals left something still in the pocket. A wandering minstrel, he, but no things of shreds and patches. Not while basements in the side streets off the Bowery still offered for sale at most reasonable rates garments with which the original owners had parted, willingly or unwillingly, while there was still health in them.

When, at sunup, the buskers would drift together for their principal meal in one of the restaurants along Park Row, the menus may have been fly-specked but they offered striking bargains in provender. You could let your fancy range through such choices as these:

REGULAR DINNER, 13 cents
CHICKEN FRICASSEE, 8 cents
CHICKEN POT PIE, 10 cents
BEEFSTEAK PIE, baked in a pan, 5 cents
PORTERHOUSE STEAK, with fried potatoes and onions, 20 cents

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In the way of artists the world over, the table talk would be of the low tricks of this or that busker to get effects. Of how good the audience had been at Callahan's that evening, how quiet with not a glass dropped or a bum thrown out during any of the songs. Of how a guy named Georgie Cohan—a Jewish boy, they opined—had just written a peach of a song. And how two adventurous buskers had ventured the night before as far along the Bowery as Harry Cooper's at the corner of Houston Street, a tour into the provinces comparable only to the annual trek of the Metropolitan Opera Company to Atlanta.

What the Garrick Club in London was to Beerbohm Tree, what the roundtable of the Algonquin means as a forum to some of the younger players in New York today—that's what the dawn dinners in Park Row meant to the Bowery buskers twenty years ago. And their hero—the lad who was the pattern and the ideal in the secret heart of every one of them—was this same Mr. Cohan whose newest song was always the shining number in their repertoire.

Since those days, the buskers have fared variously.



GEORGE WHITE IN HIS BUSKING DAYS

One, for instance, is fiddling now as he fiddled then, having hit upon so elegant a *nom de guerre* as Vio-linsky. You have probably danced to some record of his in your time. And there was another who, even as a boy, could dance such a breakdown as made you want to get up on the bar and yell with simple pleasure. That was George White, who, after years of nimble stepping in company with that mischievous morsel, Mistress Ann Pennington, has set himself up in the world as an impresario. You probably know "George White's Scandals" where-with he annually challenges Mr. Ziegfeld as Master of Revels for these United States. Even in his present grandeur, George White can never quite forget that Irving Berlin was the uppity and highly critical waiter at Nigger Mike's to whom he had to go, hat in hand, for permission to step his steps on the coveted floorspace of that most celebrated café in Chinatown.

It was as a busker, then, that George White of the artful feet began his profitable and engaging goings on. It was as a busker that Irving Berlin learned the secret of the honkey tonk which he has carried with him like a talisman ever since. It was

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as a busker that he began to pick up his first scraps of musical education, although it should be recorded that of musicianly knowledge he has even now only about as much as the writers of folk songs have been wont to have since the world began.

The biographer of such a composer as Arthur Sullivan can tell how that great master of sweet tunes was learning his trade while he was also learning to walk, how his father was the band-master at Sandhurst and how the composer of "H. M. S. Pinafore" and "Onward Christian Soldiers" could, at the age of nine, play every instrument in the parental band. He was one whose folks cleared the way for his gift. He was only eighteen when he was conducting his own oratorio in Leipzig, with his heart thumping away violently under his waistcoat, you may be sure.

The biographer of Irving Berlin, however, must point out that when he was that age, he was not conducting his own oratorio. To be more precise, he was a waiter in a Chinatown restaurant. The biographer should also report that, after twenty years, he is not yet much of a musician. For example, he cannot begin to play the piano as George

Gershwin or Silvio Hein or Rudolph Friml can play it. In compensation, of course, these untaught pianists can sometimes play with an accent that escapes those of more orthodox education. Like most men who play only by ear Berlin is a slave of one key. Since he always plays helplessly in F sharp, he has had to have a piano especially constructed with a sliding keyboard, so that when he wants to adventure in another key, he can manage it by moving a lever and rattling away on the more familiar keys.

To the man who has written more than any one man's share of the songs this land has liked, the hieroglyphics of written music are still a trifle baffling. That incongruity is more striking to those of us who spent all our youth in the rough and ready company of textbooks. It might not be amiss for the likes of us to reflect from time to time on the fact that a not unsuccessful poet named Homer was, in all probability, unable to read and unable to write.

Of all the Berlin legend, as it has taken form in the minds of the generation brought up on his measures, the most persistent part is, oddly enough for a

legend, quite true and quite significant. It is by this time a pretty generally circulated fact that the man who wrote the only American composition which John Alden Carpenter cared to name in his list of the world's great music, has far less musically knowledge than poor Minnie Spinks, the faded spinster who still gives piano lessons in your home town. Indeed, the fact is so thoroughly established that when Berlin occasionally plays on the stage and, for the purpose, employs all his fingers instead of only one, the public is vaguely disappointed.

It was in keeping with this tradition that Chico Marx, on hearing one day that Berlin had sliced away part of a finger while making himself a midnight sandwich, observed in withering accents: "Well, that won't interfere with *his* piano playing." And though nowadays he does, as a matter of fact, use all his fingers when he plays, he is still sufficiently conscious of his shortcomings as a pianist to bring along an accompanist whenever he suspects he is going to be asked to sing. There is not enough humbug about Berlin to make him want to pretend to be taken blushingly unawares by such an invita-

tion. Thus when he was asked to a supper party to meet a certain distinguished visitor from England who was known to be fond of ragtime and in whose honor he composed an unpublished song called "His Royal Shyness" or some such title, it did not occur to Berlin that he had been asked because of his social position. Or his drawing-room wit. Or his personal beauty. So he took along a pianist. That would be a little difficult to manage if he were one of those musicians who feel in honor bound to affect surprise when called upon. I was always tremendously sympathetic with James K. Hackett in the days when it was his whim to compose tunes with which a private orchestra of sixteen pieces used to gratify his ear. When, as sometimes happened out at a party, he was asked to play some little thing of his, it took a bit of doing to create the illusion that he had just happened to have his orchestra with him. It was really a more difficult rôle than Macbeth.

It is quite true, then, that Berlin can neither read music nor transcribe it. He can only give birth to it.

And when a fellow of such little schooling as

Shakespeare then writes the loveliest poetry his language knows, the scholarly mind, in recoil from so blinding a fact, takes refuge in the troubled pretense that it is not true. But to turn back hastily from so handsome an analogy to Irving Berlin and his melodic gift, you can imagine, even if it has never happened to reach your ears, how persistent is the story that he does not write his songs at all. The story is always a little hazy in outline and invariably omits one highly interesting detail. It invariably omits the identity of the obliging, self-effacing genius who seems content that Berlin should enjoy the fame which rightly belongs to himself.

One cannot help wondering what would have happened if some benevolent soul, divining the talent in the Bowery busker, had pounced upon him, washed him and sent him off to Lawrenceville and Princeton. Probably in that event, this tale would never have been told. Probably there would have been no tale to tell.

Berlin's present piano, then, is a fearsome structure which faithfully makes amends for the lapses in its boss's education. His first piano was a somewhat battered instrument which stood in the back

room of a saloon in the Bowery. This back room supplied light refreshment to the footsore street-walkers who, when they were young and pretty, may have flourished in the comparative elegance of Union Square, but who, by this time, had drifted downhill so far that they were trudging the Bowery every night on the watch for such sailors from far ports as might still think of that waning thoroughfare as the very avenue for high jinks. With their temporary swains these forlorn damsels would come to this saloon for a parting glass of beer. But by daylight they would vanish from sight, they and all the customers. Then, before the door could be closed, there would be an empty time while the waiter was piling the chairs on the tables and swabbing a floor grown foul with spittle, tobacco juice, slopped beer and the butts of Sweet Caporals. In that interval, Izzy Baline would loiter at the piano and pick out painfully on its black keys the tunes he had heard the day before on the barrel organs of Chinatown.

CHAPTER IV

CHINATOWN

IT was in the early part of 1904 that Nigger Mike Salter opened his famous saloon and dance hall at 12 Pell Street and engaged Irving Berlin as singing waiter. In a pretentious moment, he named it the Pelham Café. But it was not so known on the blotters at Police Headquarters. It was not so known in the gaudier journals when the tearful sorority would seek to lend a dash of local color to some tale of white slavery. It was not spoken of as the Pelham Café in the jargon of the thieves and opium peddlers and street-walkers who rubbed shoulders with the sightseers in the narrow street where it stood. It was not so named in the hidden notebooks of those Columbia students where it was prominently mentioned as an excellent laboratory for those extra-curriculum studies in sociology *not* required by Nicholas Murray Butler. Every one called it Nigger Mike's.

Nigger Mike's stood in the heart of Chinatown. There, on a spot which had once been given over to a brewery, a small, suspect colony of yellow men had been accumulating for more than forty years. It began when one Ah Ken, back before the Civil War, bought himself a frame house on Mott Street, married a formidable Irishwoman, opened up a cigar stand in Park Row and drew unto himself neighbors from among the Chinese drifting into the port of New York. By 1904, there must have been more than a thousand Chinamen stowed away layer on layer in the grimy honeycomb of tenements in the triangle between Pell and Mott Streets and the Bowery. But this resident population was as nothing to the swarm that came from towns and cities all about when industrious Chinamen would close their laundries and come to New York for a spree. Ugly tales of smuggling and murder and debauchery kept the surrounding city nervous. By the time the outrages committed in the scuffles of the tong rivalries had dribbled into our bewildered courts and hours of baffling testimony given by unintelligible witnesses of a most innocent aspect had reduced our judges and juries to the verge of

mild hysteria, the unearthed vengeances of Chinatown seemed ever so quaint. Even comical. But to the young police reporters, stumbling up black stairways to find some pretty, sixteen-year-old Chinese girl lying crumpled on a disordered floor with her throat slit—well, somehow to them it all seemed less amusing.

Thus did the Pelham Café stand in a tangle of old streets that had come down in the world. Already the character of Chinatown has changed and is changing. Another kind of life is slipping in there. But then, for that matter, it was not so many years before that pleasant farms stretched all about that spot. Why, it was but a stone's throw from Nigger Mike's to the site of Colonel Rutgers' orchard where, on a fine September morning, they hanged to the branch of a gnarled apple tree a young New England school teacher named Nathan Hale.

This Nigger Mike, who seems likely to be longest remembered because it was his bright idea to engage Irving Berlin as a singing waiter, was no negro, but a Russian Jew of good stock whose swarthy skin had earned him the vivid nickname which stuck to him for better or worse all his troubled days in

the land. He was a ward heeler of a type that is passing. He trafficked in influence and he would spend tireless days puttering about to loose some no-account from the clutches of the police. When any of the pickpockets and second-story men who had influential friends among the Pelham's patrons would run afoul of the law in some remote community, the captive would send an underground courier to Nigger Mike, trusting implicitly in his misbegotten neighborliness.

Immediately he would go to work for the defense and it was his favorite trick to unearth some bel-dame in Cherry Hill, clothe her in the traditional costume of neat but humble toil and rehearse her patiently in her rôle. That rôle involved her visiting the troublesome jurisdiction and weeping disconsolately until her alleged son would be confided to her maternal care by some sentimental sheriff. These tactics were usually effective unless, as sometimes happened, Nigger Mike became confused and tried to work the release of some visible co-religionist of his own by the maternal tears of an Irish-woman whose brogue fairly shook the astonished court room.

Mike was an amiable enough employer, except when the drink was in him. To be sure he might grow irritable at dawn, when the cash in the till would be short and he would have forgotten his own nonchalant raids made on it in some moment of generosity earlier in the convivial night. It was Sulky, the barkeep, who finally threatened to walk out for good and all unless Mike's own chuckle-headed borrowings from his own till were written down in the book as the custom of the country required in the case of loans made to favored patrons.

Of course Mike was busy as a bee at election time. And he did more than buzz. Indeed, it was a passion for the suffrage which proved his undoing and closed his place for good—unquestionably for good. It was one November when Tammany's landslide was so inevitable that none of the faithful needed to lift a finger in aid. But for old times' sake and all on his own hook, Mike went loyally around town voting away for dear life in every precinct. This constancy was such that an irritated Grand Jury grew curious and spoke unfavorably of one Salter's civic habits. So, for many years, Pell Street heard from Nigger Mike only through the medium of

laboriously composed letters all bearing the post-mark of the Dominion of Canada. Thus no sins of its own but just the misdirected devotion of its loyal but impractical proprietor brought an end to the Pelham Café.

It is the way of New York to look back on any past decade in its history with a kind of pleasurable shudder, in the manner of a respectable man spreading an impression that in his youth he was a pretty desperate character. In this fashion the reminiscences of the Chinatown of twenty years ago hint at dark misdeeds compared with which its often humdrum story is quite commonplace. So there has grown up a legend that the Pelham Café was a dreadful dive where sinister crimes were brewed and murder stalked in the gray hours before day. As a matter of fact, it was a cautious, orderly saloon, comically anxious for the good opinion of the police, and as a rule about as sinister and eventful as a village postoffice.

The biographer of Irving Berlin must struggle with a temptation to hint that he served his apprenticeship in one of the deepest hell-holes of a depraved past and the temptation is all the stronger because

there are so many good people who would believe it. For that was their understanding at the time. Inasmuch as the Pelham Café counted heavily on the tourist trade, its sagacious proprietor rather encouraged the legend that his backroom was a sort of thieves' Algonquin, a pickpockets' round table, a Coffee House for the lawless.

Inevitably, in response to this legend, the great of this and other lands came tiptoeing naughtily and anonymously to Nigger Mike's. They would stay long enough to buy a round of drinks, they would seek to cover their lack of ease by tipping the lyric waiter on a scale to which he was distinctly *not* accustomed and then would go their ways under the delusion that they had seen life at mighty close range. A thinly disguised duchess would come fluttering to Pell Street and hurry home to write in her diary that she had sat that night at the very next table to a well-known burglar. My, what fun! It would have been cruel of the singing waiter to have whispered in her ear that her burglar was just a clerk in need of a shave.

Gamblers there would be, of course, drowning in inexpensive beer their latest resentment against

the intrusive police. Pickpockets came, too, to spend the pleasant profits of a familiar ritual which combined the tactics of football interference with the more delicate tricks of sleight-of-hand and which, when earnestly practiced in the aisle of a crowded trolley car, would yield the price of many a drink at Nigger Mike's. Not that such profits were flaunted. Indeed you (or the inquisitive police) might have searched these gentry in vain for any evidence of unearned increment. But in the need and heat of a crap game down the street they themselves would suddenly reveal veritable *caches* of gold tucked away in their shoes or hatbands or sewn into their innocent lapels. Mere vulgar display of wealth, however, would be made only by the gaudier folk from uptown and it was part of the singing waiter's business to detect what type of customer liked to have his emptied wine bottles accumulate on the table so that all the world might see what a sport he was—what a sport and what a spender.

Women came and went, forlorn women to whom life in their middle years had offered nothing brighter than an embarrassing domesticity with the little yellow men who dwelt on the edge of the Bowery.

Indeed such a woman found the back room of the Pelham a kindly refuge. For we all have to be snobbish about something and it was Nigger Mike's fastidious rule that no Chinaman should pass further than the outer bar of the Pelham Café. Toward dawn such a slattern would vanish into some cubby-hole in one of the surrounding buildings and be seen no more until another night. She would be giving way then to the younger and jauntier girl from the sidewalks of Fourteenth Street who thought of the Pelham Café as no hunting ground but rather a friendly, comfortable haven where she might spend her own richly earned holiday hour. Towards three or four in the morning, she would call it a night and adjourn to Nigger Mike's for a little beer in company of some lad she really liked—some lad after her own heart and, as often as not, also after her own earnings.

She in turn would give way of a Saturday evening to the respectable householders of the neighborhood who would repair to the Pelham Café to dance as now Riverside Drive goes to the Club Mirador. And it was on the Pelham's floor, with Chuck Connors leading the way, that the foxtrot was born.

Of course it was not impossible for a palpitant sightseer really to see a burglar in the flesh at No. 12. There was always the chance that some loan from the till, duly recorded in the damp but accurate ledger which Sulky kept behind the glasses under the bar, might finance an expedition calculated to interest the constabulary of Glen Cove or New Rochelle. But in the motley pageant of humanity that shuffled slowly and interminably under the flaring lights of Nigger Mike's, burglars were few and far between and gunmen were nervously shunted off to the more lawless resorts along the Bowery. In that pageant you might see the weak and cruel mouth of Gyp the Blood or the gleaming head of the bald Jack Rose which later shone from the witness stand in those trials that followed the murder of Herman Rosenthal. But you were quite as likely to see the interested eye of Prince Louis of Battenberg or the attentive ear of some novelist in search of local color. Indeed, the sightseers usually outnumbered the local talent and the grand folk who journeyed eagerly from Fifth Avenue to Nigger Mike's seeking glimpses of the seamy side of life were usually in the predicament of those American

tourists who retreat to some quaint village in France or Spain only to find its narrow streets clogged with not strikingly picturesque visitors from Red Bank, N. J., Utica, N. Y. and Kansas City, Mo. It was among such folk mostly that Berlin moved, with a tray in his hand and a song on his lips, while Nick played at the piano in the back room and Sulky poured the drinks in front.

Thus it has often happened that Irving Berlin, sitting at some dinner table in London or New York, has suddenly (and silently) recognized in his host or the guest across the way some former gay blade to whom he had been wont to bear drinks in the old days off the Bowery. Sometimes it has been his privilege to express out of a full heart an admiration first formed back in his apprenticeship as a minstrel. The song he wrote when Governor Smith of New York was first proposed for the presidency, the song which caught up the magic lilt of "East Side, West Side, all around the town," was an act of devotion to one he first knew when young Smith had just been elected to the Assembly from the district in which Berlin was a shabby troubadour.

It might amuse, and possibly afflict, Harry Lauder

to know that he once lavished a ten cent tip on a waiter who, as it turned out, could have got along well enough without any such nestegg. Yet it was as a waiter who had declined a tip that Irving Berlin first came to public notice beyond the limits of his own Chinatown. The aforesaid Prince Louis of Battenberg was being shown the seamy side of New York and the news that so extensively advertised a visitor would be coming to Pell Street threw Nigger Mike's into quite a flutter. Mike, in a burst of grandeur and confusion, insisted that the drinks be on the house. Wherefore, when the Prince tried to go in for a bit of largesse to the waiter, that nervous functionary backed away respectfully, not being used to princes and fearful lest he ruin his country's reputation for hospitality. Of course there was a reporter in the Prince's party and the spectacle of a New York waiter declining a tip struck him as possessing all the elements of a news story. Thus it befell that the next day Irving Berlin made his first appearance in the public prints.

The reporter who thus exploited him was a ruddy and impressive lad named Swope, who has since made himself heard even above the din of our nois-

iest city and who is today the editor of the New York *World*. By such incidents, and there were many of them, Nigger Mike's, like the rest of Chinatown, grew even more self-conscious. The behavior of that squalid community became as studied as that of Mr. Belasco on a first night. The deep streams of a transplanted Shanghai ran steady and invisible and unaltered. But ways and means were found to keep a certain amount of hocus pocus going to *épater les bourgeois*. Shops and restaurants, especially established and decorated and peopled for sightseers, did a thriving trade and entirely law abiding and worthy dummies lounged through them trying conscientiously to look as much like abandoned characters as possible.

Busses trundled the wide-eyed yokelry from Madison Square to the Bowery and the obliging man with the megaphone, while seeming to conduct them casually through the iniquities of Chinatown, was really following a trail carefully blazed from one prepared bit of scenery to another. The glimpses of Chinatown vouchsafed to such herded visitors were just about as artless and spontaneous as the glimpses of American home life afforded by the groups in the

department store windows. It was local color as convincing as the latter day complexions. If you kept watch, you could actually see it being put on.

For instance, the man with the megaphone seemed first to stumble and then look with heartwrung compassion on Chinatown Gertie. Yet behind the scenes, Gertie and he were in cahoots. A frowsy slattern, she dwelt year in and year out in suffocating quarters above Nigger Mike's—occupying a windowless room just large enough to hold her bed, her pipe and her other kimono. It was one small cell in the tiers of such pigeonholes which rose above the bars and cafés at the street levels. The guide to Chinatown would lead the tourists past her door, then think to turn back and peer in that he might see if, by any chance, some dulled opium addict were visible there. Yes, by great good luck, here was some poor, outcast woman, a lost soul drugging and drowsing her shattered life way. The visitors gasped by a kind of contagion and the megaphone man would become so affected by this pitiable sight that, as if by some uncontrollable impulse, he would reach into his big-hearted pocket and toss a half dollar onto Gertie's somewhat soiled counter-

pane. The awestruck tourists could do no less than follow suit and by the time the last of them had stumbled down the stairway and out into the light of Pell Street, there would be quite a heap of coins for Chinatown Gertie. Of course she could not keep them all. She was in honor bound to split her receipts with the megaphone man every Saturday night, a ceremony sometimes rendered violent by his hints that she was not making a complete division and by her audible conviction that he was a rotten bad actor whose expressed sympathy with her was so badly performed that it hardly paid a lady to have her privacy intruded upon.

It was really Gertie who, without in the least intending it, brought about a great cleansing of the building in which Nigger Mike was the ground floor tenant. It happened at Christmas time. The city was powdered with snow and holly wreaths hung in a million windows. An improbable Santa Claus with a merry bell gathered pennies at every corner for the Christmas dinners of the poor. The sidewalks were crowded here and there with evergreens cut in the hills and dragged across the bridges to help New York out in its annual clumsy and pathetic

effort to recapture the atmosphere of a day when there *were* such things as hearths and each family had its own chimney. There was Christmas in the air.

It was quite too much for Chinatown Gertie. She bought herself a small, scraggly tree from a grocer in the Bowery, decked it with frills of colored paper and lighted here and there among its meager branches a rakish candle. And then, because there was no one to enjoy this rite with her, she lay back pensive among her memories. The firemen, whose screeching scarlet chariots were soon scattering the human chaff in the narrow footways of Chinatown, dragged Gertie out just in time to save her from the flames which swept vengefully through the dark dormitory above Nigger Mike's and emptied into Pell Street a strange and blinking company.

It was on the eve of the preceding Christmas that one Hobnailed Casey paid his last visit to Nigger Mike's. Casey was a small, sandy, unsmiling menace in Chinatown, whose trust in his neighbors was such that he liked always to be cleaning his nails because he felt more comfortable with an open knife ready in his hand. He was never precisely welcome

anywhere, but he was enough of a regular at the Pelham to be debited unquestionably with a \$50 advance on Sulky's book of loans. He might have shared in many another Christmas festivity had Mike himself been there that night but all this befell in the uneconomic, friendly old days when railroad passes went even to the friends of friends of politicians and Mike had departed for Hot Springs, leaving Frisco Joe in charge of his domain.

Joe, fresh and little bitter from a stud game across the street, dropped in at two in the morning to see if all was well and great was his wrath to learn that Hobnailed Casey had offensively passed that way. Casey had drifted in with his lady, it seems, ordered a waltz from Nick and started to dance. Then, because the measures did not please him, he had stretched Nick on the floor with one blow and departed swaggering. Perhaps Joe felt a pang at the thought of so defenceless a retainer being thus bullied on a Christmas morning: more probably he was hot at such liberties being taken during his reign. At all events he stalked to the ice box where the house gun was kept within easy reach and shifted it to his pocket. Then out he went and a few minutes later

the night was split with the sound of pistol shots. In a twinkling, no one was left in the Pelham but Sulky, glumly polishing glasses.

Around the corner in Doyer Street, on the sidewalk in front of the Chatham Club, Casey lay mute, his blood staining the new fallen snow. In the circle of staring faces that formed around him, Berlin stayed just long enough to hear that Frisco Joe had darted up a crazy flight of stairs and vanished forever over the roofs: long enough, too, to hear the ambulance surgeon straighten up and borrow a phrase from an older and sweeter Christmas story. Hobnailed Casey, he said, was dead as a doornail. Berlin was the first one back to Nigger Mike's with the news. Sulky only grinned and showed the page in his ledger where already a pencil stroke had been drawn through the item:

HOBNAILED CASEY.....\$50

"Gee," murmured the singing waiter, appreciatively, "did you do that when you heard the shot?"

"I did it," said the admirable Sulky, "when I saw Joe take the gat out of the ice box."

Frisco Joe, after performing what was unquestionably a public benefit, has not returned to New York to enjoy its appreciation. Sulky, who is a fine and sensitive gentleman, has moved on to other fields. Nick is dead. Nigger Mike is dead. In the week before another Christmas, on the front page of the late *New York Herald* for December 18, 1922, the circumstances of his passing were duly recorded. The article, like most of the best writing done in American journalism, was anonymous, but the fact that it was written by the gallant and gifted Walter Davenport, sometime captain of infantry on the River Vesle, might be recorded in reproducing it here. As necrologist, Captain Davenport made this report:

It was just such a day as yesterday that Nigger Mike Salter was a pallbearer at Big-Hearted Johnny Gallagher's funeral twenty years ago. Mr. Gallagher had come to an untimely end in front of the Pelham Café, 12 Pell Street, Nigger Mike's place, a vagrant bullet taking him squarely between the eyes.

When Nigger Mike presented himself at the Gallagher home that raw morning to pay his last respects to Big-Hearted Johnny, he slipped a pint of rye and a one hundred dollar bill into the lap of the bereaved widow sitting at the head of the coffin. Leaning over

Mr. Gallagher's remains and grasping both sides of the coffin, Mike began to speak in husky tones.

"Well," said Mike, "he's gone; the poor old rum pot's gone. I knowed him when he had a livery stable. I knowed him when he lost the livery stable and started a saloon. I knowed him when he lost the saloon. Yes, the old rum pot's gone. The poor old rum pot. Well, you poor old rum pot; so you're gone, hey?"

Grief stopped the voice of Nigger Mike Salter. A wail from the bereaved widow arose and Mike drew another pint from a hip pocket. Laying the second pint in the lady's lap, Mike roared:

"Lady, send the undertaker's bill to me. The poor old rum pot's gone, and while I don't know who cooked him, the funeral's on me."

The lamented Mr. Gallagher's brother, Jesse, attended Nigger Mike Salter's funeral yesterday, coming all the way from Philadelphia to do it. He came to find Nigger Mike lying in a plain pine box—not even varnished. Mr. Jesse Gallagher had to make financial sacrifices to attend the funeral yesterday, so he wasn't able to do for Mrs. Salter what Nigger Mike had done for Mrs. Gallagher.

"But it certainly knocks me stiff," said Mr. Gallagher. "When the Honorable Mike Salter buried my brother he was worth half a million. Today's he planted with his family flat. Not a cent of insurance. Not a cent for next month's rent. But he certainly did my brother proud."

Nigger Mike Salter was buried yesterday in Washington Cemetery after a great deal of furor. But all the glory that once was Mike had departed. Just two of the legion of notables who once found it pleas-

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ant to boast of Mike's friendship and familiarity with his notorious dive—the Pelham—appeared at the funeral. In fact there was but one—Irving Berlin.

The only other notable present was Kenneth Sutherland, the Democratic Boss of Coney Island, and Sutherland was never one of the patrons of the Pelham. So that leaves just one—Irving Berlin, the song composer whose first job in America was that of waiter at the Pelham. Berlin used to sing as he slung beer and they knew him as the Singing Waiter.

Mike didn't leave money enough to pay the fees of the professional mourners; therefore there were none. When the New York *Herald* reporter arrived at the Salter home, 3053 East Fourth Street, yesterday, he was ushered into a house that had no rugs or carpets and very little furniture. On the poor chairs and on a couch, sprawled a dozen young men who wore drab shirts and caps, but who had come to the house of mourning in fine big motor cars. They spoke mysteriously of long motor trips at night and without lights. They talked freely enough until they learned that the stranger was a reporter and after that they had nothing to say.

Mike's body lay in a bare, unheated room. He looked more than his fifty-four years. At the foot of the pine box sat his mother, Rachel, 87 years old and almost hidden under a red knitted shawl and a calico apron. In a minor tone she was chanting and keeping the rhythm by swaying to and fro. At the head of the box sat Mike's widow. Every so often she would scream. In the bare hallways and on the stairs leading to the second floor, twenty men slouched. The collars of their overcoats were pulled down. It was cold

in Nigger Mike's house. There were no flowers nor wreaths.

Sonny, Mike's youngest of five, was rolling a ball up and down the hallway having the time of his three-year-old life. Now and then one of the boys in the hall or on the stairs would toss Sonny a nickel. Sonny would howl with delight and by way of repaying the boys he would hold up a colored comic sheet and explain the jokes.

The funeral was to have taken place at a quarter to one. First Mike's sister had hysterics and it required four or five of the strongest boys from the Atlantic Social Club to carry her out of the room. Then they fetched Mike's wife in and she couldn't stand it.

"For God's sake! let me speak to him," she screamed. "The father of my darlings; the father of my darlings. Let me speak to him. Mike, speak, to the mother of your darlings."

After the service, six of the boys from the Atlantic Social Club grasped the pine box and another of them threw a blanket over it. They tried to get it out of the tiny parlor, but found it hard. One of the boys, a piano mover by profession, took charge and under his expert direction they manœuvred the box out of the hallway.

Nigger Mike left a widow and five children. He died in utter poverty. Despite the name by which he was generally known it should be noted that Nigger Mike Salter, although of swarthy complexion, was a white man.

"Treat him as kind as you can," said Irving Berlin to the reporters. "He was no angel, may be, but there are a lot of guys on the street today who would have been in jail if it hadn't been for Nigger Mike."

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It was not the break-up of the Pelham Café which sent Berlin on his way uptown. It was not disdain of this shabby tavern nor a stirring desire for a better world which drove him out. He was fired.

It happened one morning in 1907 when Sulky had gone home at six o'clock and left the waiter in charge for the final two hours of the Pelham's day. He would have nothing much to do except sweep up the backroom, draw beer for bricklayers on their way to work and keep an eye on the till. So, standing at the bar with his face pillow'd on his arms, he went to sleep. When he came to, Nigger Mike was shaking him. The sun was up and in the drawer of the yawning cash register there was no sign of the \$25 that had been in it when Sulky left at six. Wherefore Nigger Mike gave vent to his ideas on the singing waiter's voice, his probity and his ancestry. He further bade him clear out and never show his ugly face in Chinatown again. This ex-communication was not inartistic, considering the fact that Mike delivered it under one inherent difficulty to which Sulky later and privately bore witness. It was Nigger Mike himself, as it hap-

pened, who, while the guardian of the cash register slept, had taken the twenty-five.

It was a not especially optimistic minstrel who started uptown that day to make his fortune. He was a perplexed boy of nineteen whose anxious thoughts kept reverting to those Bowery lodging houses, on his memories of which vagabondage he had been carefully silent during his bourgeois days as a salaried man at Nigger Mike's. Now he was pretty worried, but before long he was turning his hand to the making of songs and within four years from that dreary morning he had spun a tune—a jubilant, exultant tune that wore out the pianos in New Orleans dives and filled the night air under countless campus elms. They played it in Moscow and along the Riviera. You heard it in every corner of Shanghai and it came in brass across the harbor at Singapore from the boats riding at anchor there. It was called "Alexander's Rag Time Band."

CHAPTER V

UNION SQUARE

BERLIN next moved on to a halfway station between Chinatown and Tin Pan Alley. He went to work at once as singing waiter at Jimmy Kelly's place in Union Square—much such a place as Nigger Mike's was, save that the woman who slouched in for a nip of Scotch was likely to be younger and less dilapidated. Among the men who hung about the backroom in the late afternoon or at midnight, song and dance men abounded. For Kelly, an ex-pugilist whose present picturesque restaurant in Greenwich Village is a favorite perch for the nighthawks, opened his first café in Fourteenth Street just down the way from Tony Pastor's, a waning temple of the varieties still faintly lighted with the rosy afterglow of a sumptuous woman named Lillian Russell. Therefore it was to an audience of professionals—jugglers, comedians, tenors,

and hoofers who lodged across the street in the battered row of brownstone fronts, known as Cook's Boarding House—that the new singing waiter proffered the first song of his own writing. This song was ambitiously though not unconventionally entitled: "Marie from Sunny Italy."

It had been concocted while he was still at Nigger Mike's and it was born of a jealousy that burned in the bosoms of himself and Nick when they heard that the rival team around the corner at Callahan's in the Bowery—Al Piantadosi, the pianist (who was later to move uptown himself and give birth to "I Did Not Raise My Boy to be a Soldier"), and Big Jerry, the waiter—had composed a song and that furthermore some fools uptown had been crazy enough to publish it. As it happens this song had a considerable vogue. It was called "My Mariucci Take a Steamboat." The ensuing airs put on by its authors were too much for the smouldering pair at Nigger Mike's. It was agreed at once that they too must publish a song. Nick, of course, would invent the tune and the waiter must write the words, for which, they said, he had a knack because he was already famous in Chinatown for the amus-

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ing if seldom printable travesties he improvised as the new songs found their way downtown. As the resulting lyric was Irving Berlin's first published work, it should properly be set forth here in full. Here it is:

Oh, Marie, 'neath the window I'm waiting,
Oh, Marie, please don't be so aggravating.
Can't you see my heart just yearns for you, dear,
With fond affection and love that's true, dear?
Meet me while the summer moon is beaming,
For you and me the little stars are gleaming.
Please come out tonight, my queen,
Can't you hear my mandolin?

My sweet Marie from sunny Italy,
Oh, how I do love you.
Say that you'll love me, love me, too,
Forever more I will be true,
Just say the word and I will marry you
And then you'll merely be
My sweet Marie from sunny Italy.

Oh, Marie, I've been waiting so patiently,
Oh, Marie, please come out and I shall happy be.
Raise your window, love, and say you're coming.
The little birds, dear, are sweetly humming.
Don't say "No," my sweet Italian beauty,
There's not another maiden e'er could suit me.
Come out, love, don't be afraid,
And listen to my serenade.

This masterpiece was wrought with great groanings and infinite travail of the spirit. Its rhymes, which filled the young lyricist with the warm glow of authorship, were achieved day by day and committed nervously to stray bits of paper. Much of it had to be doctored by Nick, with considerable experimenting at the piano and a consequent displeasure felt by the patrons at Nigger Mike's who would express their feelings by hurling the damp beer cloths at the singer's head. Truly it might be said that Berlin's first song was wrought while he dodged the clouts of his outraged neighbors.

Finally the thing was done and then the two stared blankly at the bleak fact that neither of them knew how to record their work. Nick could read sheet music after a fashion but he had no notion how to reverse the process. He did not know how to catch hold of the pretty tune in his head and imprison it in those strange hieroglyphics which would interpret it to posterity or at least for the big stiffs at Callahan's.

The baffled pair consulted Fiddler John, a Bowery shoe cobbler whose avocation it was to play the violin in such marts every evening after the light

necessary for his real work had faded. Fiddler John wistfully confessed a like ignorance and when the song was finally transcribed, the work was done by a young violinist who shall remain unidentified in this narrative because he has since clothed himself in the grandeur of a Russian name and betaken himself to the concert platform with the air of a virtuoso just off the boat from Paris.

Next the masterpiece was borne with shaking knees to Tin Pan Alley, where it was promptly accepted by Joseph Stern for publication. Berlin's total revenue for his share in this, his first song, was the sum of 37 cents.

If you chance to possess that unvalued rarity—a copy of this artless song—you will note that its words are ascribed to I. Berlin. The complete *nom de guerre*, which is now a part of the history of American music, was gradually and shyly arrived at. For some reason his really distinguished patronymic, Baline, proved difficult to his neighbors and Berlin represents an effort to spell out the sound of the thing everyone called him anyway. Indeed, he had been Berlin ever since he gave up his half-hearted and not shiningly successful effort to be

Marie FROM Sunny Italy



THE FIRST SONG

known as Mr. Cooney. At Nigger Mike's, of course, and at Jimmy Kelly's, he was always called Izzy. Nowadays such old cronies as Sulky and the bar-keep at Kelly's may begin their occasional reunions with their great man by calling him Mr. Berlin, but after five minutes of that nonsense he becomes Izzy again and everyone is comfortable.

It must have been about the time of his first diamond ring that he entertained his first ambition to be known as Irving. That ring, bought piece-meal from a wandering merchant, was a great event in his career as a busker and it seemed almost within his grasp the morning he sat up till nine o'clock when the Bowery Savings Bank would open and he could enter it with the accumulated twenty dollars they required before permitting one to open an account. The ring, once acquired, gave him his first hint of the burden that vast riches entail. For when, as so often, he would fall asleep beside the piano at Nigger Mike's, the local humorists would steal his ring from him and not yield it up until he had ransomed it by opening a bottle of champagne. And in the end it proved a sore disappointment, for the skeptical jeweler with whom he finally had to

hypothecate it, would pay him only one dollar for every ten he had given to the evil old peddler who had sold it to him.

The accompanying ambition not only to wear a diamond (preferably next time a real one) but also to be known as Irving remained for some time a secret of his bosom. When the time came to publish the first song, he itched to sign it Irving Berlin, but he knew a copy would always be left casually on the piano rack at Nigger Mike's and he feared the derision of the gang. Still Israel was too solemn and Talmudic a name with which to depress a popular song. Izzy was too ornery. It smacked of Cherry Street and sweltering doorsteps. So, compromising between an old pride and a new embarrassment, he signed the first song "I. Berlin."

It was not this song, nor the two that followed it—a song called "Queenie, My Own," which he wrote to the music of a pianist who drifted into Jimmy Kelly's, and a song called "The Best of Friends Must Part" which he produced painfully but unaided—it was none of these casual attempts which implanted in Berlin's mind the notion that he need not be a waiter at all. That idea was born of an

accidental ballad called "Dorando." This was a piece of doggerel turned out with much strain after a song and dance man, between beers at Kelly's one day, had grandly commissioned him to write something timely and amusing to be recited in Italian dialect between numbers at Tony Pastor's.

Dorado was the name of an Italian Marathon runner who was then entertaining the sporting world by running a losing race against a fleet Indian named Longboat. Berlin fashioned a tale about an Italian barber who patriotically staked his all on Dorando and lost. It was when the comedian declined to pay the promised ten dollars for this earnest effort that Berlin took it up to Tin Pan Alley to offer it for sale. There, in the office of Ted Snyder, Inc., in the upper thirties, he finally gained access to the inner sanctum and recited his piece in his best busking manner to the manager, an alarming person named Watterson, subsequently general director of the successful house of music publishers known to ragtime orchestras from Chinatown to the Barbary Coast as Watterson, Berlin and Snyder.

"Well," said the alarming person on this faintly

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historic occasion, "I suppose you've got a tune to this."

"Yes," lied the singing waiter from Jimmy Kelly's, thinking, if at all, that he would dig up a pianist and get a tune from him before noon next day.

"All right," said Watterson, "I'll give you \$25 for the thing, words and music. Just you trot into the next room to the arranger and he'll take your tune down for you."

In which moment of agony, Berlin could only clutch at his manuscript, and, as the yawning musician looked up with pencil poised, hum something that seemed to jog along somehow in step with the words there on the paper in his hand. The result was a song called "Dorando" which had its little day in the music halls and made quite a bit of money for Mr. Watterson. So did its immediate successor, a popular ballad horribly entitled "Sadie Salome—Go Home." Whereupon the publishing house graciously drew up a stupifying document full of words which no singing waiter could be expected to understand and so long that Berlin could never get really into it without going to sleep. So he

showed it anxiously to an amiable lawyer who used to drop in occasionally at Kelly's. This passerby ran his eyes down the formidable pages and advised the waiter not to sign it. So that was that. But into the gist of the agreement, if not into its legal toils, Berlin entered jubilantly enough. He was to stop being a waiter and become a writer of lyrics. These would be tricked out with tunes and published by the Ted Snyder Company, which house would pay him a royalty on every copy sold and allow him, meanwhile, a drawing account of \$25 a week.

He had turned a corner and found himself in Tin Pan Alley. Whereat he was frightened and happy—happier than words can tell. For a voice—perhaps the ancestral voice of some cantor in a poor synagogue in Russia countless years before—was whispering to him that he had found his way home.

CHAPTER VI

BROADWAY

IT was in 1909 that Berlin went apprehensively to work for the Snyder Company. With the success of "Sadie Salome" for which Edgar Leslie wrote some of the words and which invaded at least 200,000 innocent American homes, he plunged into the steady fashioning of the more than 300 songs with which, at the age of 36, he is credited. Or debited, if that is the way you feel about popular music. Debited if, as many do, you suspect him of having all by himself invented first ragtime and then the jazz orchestras which you vaguely associate with loose-living, alcoholism, bobbed hair, distrust of government, and disrespect for old age.

At first he was supposed to write only the lyrics, for there was Snyder himself all full of tunes and knowing roughly twenty times as much about music as Berlin did. The writing of countless verses was

a matter of considerable anguish to one who had so small and dingy a hold on the language of the land. When, in the midst of the vogue of one of his earlier songs, the *Evening Journal* commissioned him to turn out two hundred verses to it, at the rate of six a week, the order was carried out only after much beading of the brow. It was the mordant Wilson Mizner who made an historic remark about this meager vocabulary.

"Berlin," said Mizner, "is a man of few words."

For a time he took refuge in dialect ballads, in which, he fondly hoped, the somewhat fragmentary vocabulary might be mistaken for a deliberate touch of art. And usually since then his songs have been written in the vernacular as a glance at such titles as "Yiddle on your Fiddle," or "How Do You Do It, Mabel, On Twenty Dollars a Week," or "Business is Business, Rosy Cohen," would suggest. Furthermore, some such couplet as

You can see
He and she

is likely to smite the ear in some of the most engaging songs of his later years. It is when you find

London and Paris wondering what the word "whattle" means in "What'll I Do," that you realize how faithfully Berlin has clung to the idiom of the sidewalk. Perforce he has worked in the vulgate as Will Rogers does. The lyrics of Irving Berlin are as truly "in American" as any of Mr. Lardner's or Master Weaver's adventures in the local patois.

Probably Berlin's heart is happiest these days when some mob breaks suddenly into an old melody of his as if it were "Suwanee River" or "Old Kentucky Home" or some other tune that had been running in and out of their childhood. Yet he began as a lyric writer and his secret and sinful pride is still in the neat and unexpected rhymes with which he has punctuated the songs of his more sophisticated years. Usually the lyric comes first or at least starts first. He may begin, let us say, with some such phrase as "What'll I do?" It was a happy day for him when he discovered that there could be triplets in words as well as in music and he delights in such triplets as "Nevertheless" or "*Look at 'Em Doing It*" or "*Full of Originality*" or "What'll I do?" which are like boyish skips of

joy in the midst of a sedate walk. Then lyric and melody grow apace, each shaping and giving character to the other. That is probably why folks find them easy to sing and why the words and music go jogging off across the world together with the sturdiness and independence of folk songs.

But usually he starts with a phrase of words rather than with a phrase of music. It is difficult, for instance, to escape the impression that his enormously popular "Down on the Farm" had its entire origin in no deeper or more sincere inspiration than his desire to use the couplet

Oh, how I wish again
That I was in Michigan.

The resulting lay has practically enshrined him in all hearts out Detroit way and the song is sick with a yearning for green fields which no Bowery boy ever really felt.

A like suspicion is attached to the quatrain in the second verse of "Lazy" which runs:

I'll be so glad when I am
Among the chickens
With Mr. Dickens
Or Mr. Omar Khayyam.

The latter day verses are all far more workman-like and when he came back from the warm sands of Palm Beach with the words and music of "Lazy" jotted down in odd corners of his memory, it was probably the words over which he had toiled the more faithfully and which gave him the greater satisfaction. That chorus runs in this wise:

I wanna be lazy,
I wanna be lazy,
I wanna lie in the sun
With no work to be done,
Under that awning
They call the sky,
Stretching and yawning
And let the world go drifting by.
I wanna peep
Through the deep
Tangled wildwood
Counting sheep
Till I sleep
Like a child would.
With a great big valiseful,
Of books to read where it's peaceful,
While I'm
Killing time,
Being lazy.

As you see it there in cold type, it doubtless strikes you as something less than tripping. Which might

be said of "Ach du lieber Augustin" or "Dixie" or any other good folk song in the world. What with its several vulgarisms and its quite unequal gait, you probably recognize "Lazy" as a verse nicely calculated to afflict a critic of such classic taste and flawless prosody as F. P. A. But you should remember it was never meant to be read. It was meant to be sung. You should remember especially that no lyric written to the odd, capricious and incalculable pace of syncopated music is ever readable, for no fonts have yet been invented by which such tempo can be reflected in type. After all, Berlin's songs, for the most part, are ornery conversations written to music and in the best of them there is the true salt of the American language.

After a short time the fugitive from Chinatown and Union Square, still feeling the breath of his boyhood on his neck, began devising his own tunes. The earlier ones had a simplicity enforced by the meagerness of his capacity as a pianist and were quite innocent of such counter melodies and intricate rhythms as have marked the scores written in his venerable thirties for the Music Box.

His first protests that he wanted to write the music

as well as the words were met with an amiable discouragement by everyone about him. They were tolerant but firm, in the manner of the manager whose most profitable comedian is suddenly attacked with a ruinous ambition to play *Hamlet*. Indeed, the newcomer managed it only by the device of being careful to burst into the office with a new lyric at a time when no composer would be around.

Of course he had no piano of his own and there was none yet in the crowded home downtown to which he had long since returned, a contrite son and a puzzling but respected worker. So he would come rattling up the stairs of the office in 38th Street at two o'clock in the morning and work there happily till dawn. His notion seemed to be that he should write several songs a day. And, indeed, he poured them out so fast at one time that the wily management thought it best to pretend that he was several persons. At least one vastly profitable song called "The Pullman Porters' Parade" was thus launched under the name of Ren. G. May. If you meditate for a moment on the letters of that implausible name you will see that they spell Ger-

many, of which then highly revered nation even he knew that Berlin was the capital.

You could hardly speak to him in those days without jarring a song out of him. Thus one evening at sundown when he and a fellow song-writer named George Whiting were going into John the Barber's in 45th Street, Whiting ventured the suggestion that they knock off work and sally forth on an evening of festivity.

"My wife's gone to the country," he explained.

"Hooray!" replied Berlin, automatically.

And then stopped dead in his tracks, smitten with an idea. A song, of course, to be written in the vulgate. A song, as it happened, that within a fortnight was being hummed mischievously by truant shoe clerks and bondsalesmen on their way to work and whistled by newsboys as they hawked the *Evening Journal* along Izzy Baline's old route. For of course the two hurried at once to the office. By midnight a wet manuscript was ready and a half hour later they would be next door at Maxim's, from which sporty restaurant the sound of revelry always issued until dawn. After a moment's parley, the master of the cabaret would, with tremen-

dous manner, still the revellers long enough to propose a new song. At which signal, Whiting would dislodge the local pianist from his stool and standing on a proffered chair, the escaped busker from the Bowery would try out his new melody on its first audience.

To this day when he finishes the first draught of a song, it requires all his self control to keep from going forth to the nearest street corner, gathering a crowd around him and singing it to them. Indeed the old impulse of the busker is so strong within him that his friends are likely to hear the shifting forms of a new melody as it takes shape during a year of experiment. This weakness proved a blessing on the one occasion when he was sued for the theft of a melody. The "Pack Up Your Sins" number, the elaborate and thunderous finale of the first act in his revue at the Music Box in the fall of 1922, was the bone of contention. This bone, the plaintiff argued, was really quite too much like a composition of his own to which the larcenous Berlin must have had access since it had been on sale since the preceding May. Then did Neysa McMein and Jascha Heifetz and Lenore Ulric put aside their



THE FRIARS ON PARADE IN 1912

pastels, violins and such and journey down to court to take their Bible oath that the confiding Berlin had played and sung his "Pack Up Your Sins" as long before as the preceding January.

At first, he probably thought of the songs as something he himself could sing at cabarets and certainly it was his burning ambition to appear in a musical comedy on Broadway. Such busking must have seemed to him the very pinnacle of life. If the blessing ever came his way, the world could then be allowed to end. One could ask no more of it. Wherefore he and Snyder stormed the Shubert citadel. Finally an audition was arranged with the younger brother, then as now the impresario of the Schubert musical productions. It was a dismaying experience for Berlin. His knees a-tremble, he had scarcely reached the chorus of "My Wife's Gone to the Country" when he became uncomfortably aware that if the alarming magnate were listening at all, it could be with only half his attention. For there he was at his imposing desk, seizing the occasion to dictate some letters to his stenographer. At which blended picture of big business and art, the abashed singer broke down. And the lingering

memory of that painful embarrassment made sweeter the contract signed a year later when, after the two visitors had accumulated a little local fame, they were engaged to sing and play some of their songs in an impending Shubert show called "Up and Down Broadway." In its second act, they bounded on wearing sweaters, carrying tennis rackets and trying to look as much as possible like two genteel young athletes considerably surprised at finding a piano there in the middle of the garden.

An alumni meeting of that summer time harlequinade would be an interesting reunion for the onlooker. In addition to such notables of the day as Emma Carus and the excessively paternal Eddie Foy, there were sundry newcomers who, along with Berlin himself, have since come up in the world. For instance there was Anna Wheaton who had started in a few years before as the first Liza to play with Maude Adams in "Peter Pan." Blanche Sweet was in the chorus. And there was a minor dancer named Martin Brown who has since put away his pumps and distinguished himself as the author of such plays as "The Lady" and "Cobra." Also there was a personable young fellow named

Oscar Shaw who was eventually to sing Berlin's best songs at his Music Box. Nobody paid any special attention to one tousle-headed chorus girl, of whom, however, it might have been observed that she herself attached an absurd importance to the negligible work assigned her. She started in with "Up and Down Broadway" as a mute extra girl at \$7 a week, but she soon wormed her way into the chorus, toiling at the steps and refrains as if her entire career and the fate of Western civilization depended on her doing each thing exactly right each night. Her name was Lenore Ulric.

It was in 1911 that the newcomer in Tin Pan Alley set the shoulders of America a-swaying with the syncopated jubilance of "Alexander's Ragtime Band." It was one of several songs wrought with a time which no one had ever consciously heard before. This was the first full free use of the new rhythm which had begun to take form in the honkey-tonks where pianists were dislocating old melodies to make them keep step with the swaying hips and shoulders of the spontaneous darky dancers. It was a song which stamped a new character on American music. It sang and danced its way around

the world and royalties came in from a million and a half copies.

“Alexander” differed in two conspicuous respects from the best of Berlin’s work before and since. To begin with, it was exultant and we have all harkened more attentively to Berlin when he has been woebegone. It is in his blood to write the lugubrious melodies which, in the jargon of Tin Pan Alley, have a tear in them. Back of him are generations of wailing cantors to tinge all his work with an enjoyable melancholy. Each new downcast lay of his elicits a score of paragraphs hinting that the troubadour has been crossed in love again. No lady is to blame. It is his grandfather. “When I’m Alone, I’m Lonesome,” “When I Leave the World Behind,” “Poor Little Me,” “Nobody Knows and Nobody Seems to Care,” “All by Myself.” “All Alone,” and “What’ll I Do?”—these are the more characteristic. He would probably admit that the moment he is left alone and the sounds of the city die down, he begins to turn Russian, growing a long beard and feeling sorry for himself.

But in the first flush, it was such fun being the admired newcomer on Broadway. It was so gay to

have all his New York slapping him on the back. It was such a foretaste of glory to have the great Mr. Cohan clasp him by the hand and assure him (through the corner of the mouth and one nostril): "You're there, kid, you're there." His heart sang and the song was called "Alexander's Ragtime Band."

"Alexander" differed, too, in having been fashioned as an instrumental melody with no words to guide it. As such it had gathered dust on the shelf, wordless and ignored, until one day when he himself needed a new song in a hurry. He had just been elected to the Friars' Club and the first Friars' Frolic was destined for production at the New Amsterdam. He wanted something new to justify his appearance in the bill and so he patched together some words that would serve to carry this neglected tune of which he himself was secretly fond. In his haste, he took the cue for the lyric from an already published and quite unsuccessful song of his called, "Alexander and His Clarinet." For he alone among the writers of the world seems to have no unpleasant associations with the name of Alexander. Usually when you see that name affixed

to a character in a novel, you must be prepared to discover that character foreclosing a mortgage on some lorn widow, or, at the very least, assaulting an innocent country lass down some shady lane.

As a production number, "Alexander" was rejected by the disastrous "Folies Bergère," which soon vanished from Broadway leaving not a wrack behind, except its home which became known as the Fulton Theater. But an humbler and shrewder management around the corner made a better guess and the Columbia burlesque house was soon noisy with the boom and blare of the song which was promptly caught up by bands and orchestras and cabaret singers in endless succession. It became in no time the national curse. It infected other song-writers. It infected Berlin himself. It smote its day and generation as few songs have.

Yet it was not Berlin's responsibility for it that chiefly marked him among his brothers. It was not that he wrote "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and thereby set a new fashion in American music. It was rather that that season, as once again a few years later, he wrote not merely *a* popular song or even *the* popular song. .. But, or so it must have

seemed to his bewildered neighbors, he wrote all the popular songs. When "Alexander" was followed within a few weeks by "That Mysterious Rag," "The Ragtime Violin," and "Everybody's Doing It," and the score of the Ziegfeld Follies for that year, the effect in the honkey tonks was much such a stir as might be produced in the Authors' League, say, if *The Bookman's* chronic list of the six best sellers were to run something like this:

- "So Big," by Edna Ferber
- "Becky in Carcassonne," by Edna Ferber
- "Old Lady Fishbein," by Edna Ferber
- "Mr. Minnick Runs Away," by Edna Ferber
- "The Melting of Martha Malone," by Harold Bell Wright
- "Emma McChesney's Grandson at Andover," by Edna Ferber

Elsie Janis is wont to describe the day when Charles Dillingham brought this vaguely identified youth to call—a slim, swarthy, fragile fellow thatched with black hair that curled mutinously with no encouragement whatever. Something was said about his being adroit with ragtime and she soon followed him over to the piano to which he had retreated rather than keep an eye on his grammar

in conversation with such splendidly upholstered strangers. She had heard bits of the year's new music since she returned from Europe, also some snatches of airs *chez Fischer* in Paris or on the boat coming back. To identify them, she hummed remembered bars of the ones she had liked best. Did he know this one? And this one? And this one? Oddly enough he knew them all and played them while his eyes sparkled either with a great zest for music or with some inner amusement, which made amends for his being a pianist somewhat inferior to Paderewski. "What a memory you have!" exclaimed Miss Janis. At which observation, sometimes a doubtful compliment when addressed to a composer, he murmured, "Not at all," or something equally pat. It was later and one by one that she discovered why he had been so familiar with all those songs. He had written them.

It was not as the composer of "Alexander" or indeed strictly as a composer at all that Berlin in his first flushed season was booked at Hammerstein's Victoria. That famous and somewhat rowdy variety house which used to stand in Times Square on the site now occupied by the Rialto Theater,

rather specialized in news values. And if there were no news at the time, it would be made to order by Hammerstein's handy man, Morris Gest. Thus an Arabian potentate and his wives were imported for the Victoria, who had been a blonde and blameless Prussian family when Gest first began negotiations with them. When Paul Swan was engaged for a week of display on the Victoria's stage, his strong appeal to the management did not lie in his somewhat limited knowledge of the art of ballet. Not at all. Swan was engaged because his name had appeared signed to a Sunday magazine article entitled, "Why I Am the Most Beautiful Man in America." Then his strength as a drawing card was further increased at the first matinee by his swooning away during his performance. And when two damsels of the chorus emerged suddenly from obscurity by the diverting device of taking pot shots with their revolvers at one of the town's more conspicuous millionaires, they were promptly booked at the Victoria, at a salary which their abilities in song and dance, if unenriched by assault and battery, would scarcely have commanded.

So when Irving Berlin's name appeared suddenly

in white lights on the gaudy façade of the Victoria and a life-size photograph of him with glowing cheeks and neatly plastered hair rendered the Victoria's lobby hideous for one profitable week, it was an honor accorded not because the management was struck by his gifts as a master of melody. It was struck by his qualities as a phenomenon. His startling record of a half dozen hits, most of them published within the space of a few months, the fact that you could not get outside the sound of one or another of his tunes and still stay in America, did appeal strongly to the Victoria's taste in freaks. So with the list of his more celebrated songs placarded in the lobby, he sang there all that week.

You may imagine that he was rendered at once proud, amused and just a little uneasy when word came up from Chinatown that some 200 of the old gang were planning to attend the first performance in a body. Their Izzy had made good in the big world and they were minded to celebrate. Their advent, which graveled even the hardened ushers of the Victoria, really had the innocent "1909-this-way" accent of a Commencement reunion. They

were led down the aisle by Chuck Connors, clad in his tilted brown derby and little green jacket as of old. Chuck is dead now, having been gathered to his fathers a few years later. Sixty-three coaches followed the hearse, to say nothing of six wagons of flowers, while all his Chinese neighbors in Pell Street gathered at Number 20 to send up such chants and such joss as might be expected to propitiate the ancestral Connorses.

The Chinatown delegation at that first matinee was vociferous but refined. Berlin, hurrying to the theater just before the evening performance, was a little surprised to find two or three of his volunteer *claque* still loitering around the theater.

"Gee, Izzy," one of them confided to him darkly, "We've been hanging around this bum joint for three hours trying to get a chance to pinch that swell picture of you in the lobby."

Berlin's relish of all this must have filled his days and nights with a warm sense of well-being. It had come so suddenly. The usual chapter on the years of rejected manuscripts was quite missing from the story. He had dropped into Broadway as abruptly as if he had come by parachute. Many a

day he must have looked hastily around him on awakening for some visible proof that he would not, after all, be due at Nigger Mike's at sundown with Nick waiting for him at the piano and Sulky polishing glasses behind the bar.

Of course there were many laurel wreaths tossed in his direction. The Friars' Club, a jaunty brotherhood then in the first flush of Mr. Cohan's fraternal feelings for them, gave one of the celebrated Friars' dinners in his honor. Mr. Cohan himself would speak, it was announced. And there would be the traditional abuse heaped upon him by the late Rennold Wolf, for it was a quaint custom of the Friars to have the guest of honor at each banquet mercilessly raked over the coals by that sardonic annalist of Broadway.

The guest, this time, was in a good deal of a panic for he was so new to even Broadway's elegance that he still had a profound respect for a banquet. He knew, too, that he would have to speak and the after-dinner speech was just another of the strange phenomena of high life for which his somewhat intermittent education had made no preparation. He reconnoitred the terrain of the approaching battle

and made mention of his alarms. That would be all right, he was affably assured. It seemed the Friars often found their guests of honor unequal to the composition of an after-dinner speech. Indeed it was quite the custom to have this difficult task executed for them by the obliging Jean Havez. Berlin's instinct that this would be a false move, coupled with a sickening dread lest the prepared speech desert him midway and leave him stranded, drove the depressed recipient of the impending honors to attempt a reply in his own language.

On the great night, Cohan did speak—a jocular, generous, hospitable speech, addressed with obvious admiration to this nervous guest of honor whom he described as “a Jew boy that had named himself after an English actor and a German city.”

“Irvy,” said Cohan, “writes a great song. He writes a song with a good lyric, a lyric that rhymes, good music, music you don’t have to dress up to listen to, but it is good music. He is a wonderful little fellow, wonderful in lots of ways. He has become famous and wealthy, without wearing a lot of jewelry and falling for funny clothes. He is uptown, but he is there with the old downtown hardshell. And with all his success, you will find his watch and his handkerchief in his pockets where they belong.”

When finally the toastmaster focussed all eyes on the panicky minstrel, he rose to his feet, and at that signal there was a preliminary rumble from a piano hidden behind the arras. The notes fell into syncopated measures that were still wet on the piano rack there behind the curtain.

Friar Abbot, Brother Friars,
Ladies, Guests
And Music-Buyers.

His shoulders swayed and the music fell into his own distress of mind.

What am I gonna do?
What am I gonna do?

The words fairly invited a kind of melody that he was later to make into some of his happiest songs. And that night the music picked him up and carried him on its shoulders while he sang his thanks to the Friars.

But probably the laurel wreath which most warmed the cockles of his foolish heart was one given him quite unconsciously in London. That was on the occasion of his first visit in 1911. He was to go back there many times in later years, once to

ON TOUR WITH GEORGE COHAN



play for a week at the Alhambra, for which engagement, in his usual eleventh-hour attempt to have something new for each appearance, he wrote the "International Rag." That flight in the new syncopation was started at four in the morning in his room at the Savoy Mansions and after he had sung it that afternoon to the apparent satisfaction of stall and pit, the circumstance of such journalistic composing caught the roving attention of the London newspapers. Wherefore a swarm of pressmen from Fleet Street came to call next day on this odd Mr. Berlin from America whose name by this time had long been synonymous with ragtime in London. However had he done it, they wanted to know. And next day the papers gave involved and varied accounts of his methods. For he had sat down then and there and spun a song for the reporters. Of course it was a feat which really ought not to have impressed the countrymen of the late Sir Arthur Sullivan.

But none of this somewhat routine *réclame* was half so sweet as the unstudied flower tossed him in the first hour of his first visit to London. He was just twenty-three at the time and reasonably ex-

cited at finding himself at last in the legendary city. He hailed a cab at Victoria station to drive to his hotel. The wisp of a newsboy who opened the cab door for him on the odd chance of getting a penny for that unsolicited attention, is probably wondering to this day, if he was not killed on the Somme, why that mad young American that afternoon gave him a sovereign for his pains. Ever afterwards he made a special point of opening cab doors for people who looked as if they had come from America, but the miracle never happened again. Like Dr. Jekyll, he had been working with an unknown ingredient. He had, as it happened, been whistling, "Alexander's Ragtime Band."

CHAPTER VII

Two Songs

THERE are two songs of Berlin's which separate themselves from the long list by virtue of the circumstances under which they happened to be written. The lesser one of these, over which tenors and baritones grew tremulous in the year before America went into the war, was called "When I Leave the World Behind." The other is the one called "When I Lost You."

The first had its origin in a tale told to Berlin by the aforesaid Wilson Mizner and by the benevolent and editorial Robert H. Davis. This tale was of a strange will that had been filed by one Charles Lounsbury, a lawyer who, they said, had been committed to a shelter for the sick in mind. The will was quite orthodox in form and language, but it expressed such unprecedented testamentary intentions as those found in items like this:

ITEM—I leave to children exclusively, but only for the life of their childhood, all and every, the dandelions of the field and the daisies thereof, with the right to play among them freely, according to the custom of children, warning them at the same time against the thistles. And I devise to children the yellow shores of creeks and the golden sands beneath the waters thereof, with the dragonflies that skim the surface of said waters and the odors of the willows that dip into said waters, and the white clouds that float high over the giant trees.

And I leave to children the long, long days to be merry in, in a thousand ways, and the Night and the Moon and the train of the Milky Way to wonder at, but subject, nevertheless, to the right hereinafter given to lovers; and I give to each child the right to choose a star that shall be his, and I direct that the child's father shall tell him the name of it, in order that the child shall always remember the name of that star after he has learned and forgotten astronomy.

ITEM—To lovers I devise their imaginary world, with whatever they may need, as the stars of the sky, the red, red roses by the wall, the snow of the hawthorn, the sweet strains of music, or aught else they may desire to figure to each other the lastingness and beauty of their love.

The tale of this will, so certain to appeal to any one with so strong an O. Henry instinct as Berlin has, went straight to his romantic heart. "I'll leave the songbirds to the blind," he sang and on the cover of the song he wrote this inscription:

"Respectfully dedicated to the memory of Charles Lounsbury whose will suggested the theme for this song."

"When I Leave the World Behind" traveled far in the music halls and it was not until some years later that Berlin learned, to his considerable, though scarcely justified, chagrin, that there never had been a Charles Lounsbury at all and that the will was a fiction. You will find it complete if you go so far as to look in that singular anthology called "Heart Throbs." It was originally contributed to a bankers' magazine by a man named Fish—Willston Fish.

The other song of which some separate account must be given in any story of Irving Berlin even if it have space for mention of no other work of his is the rueful one called "When I Lost You," which George Cohan once called the prettiest song he had ever heard in his life.

Probably, all in all, the most celebrated song of his is "Alexander's Ragtime Band." Certainly "All Alone" or "What'll I Do?" seems likely to prove the most profitable. If you consult musicianly folk you are more likely to find them most impressed by the

pathfinding brilliance of "Everybody Step." Berlin's own weakness is for the sweet melody called "Lady of the Evening" which was smothered in costly and crushing scenic effects when first it was sung on the calisthenic stage of the Music Box. But to this day if he is haled to the platform of a benefit, say, and, turning at the piano, asks the audience what they want him to sing, the first and heartiest and fondest call is for "When I Lost You."

The history of that song is an oft-told tale—a legend that journeyed in the wake of the song itself when it was first published in 1913. Berlin had been married the year before to Dorothy Goetz. She was the young sister of Ray Goetz, a gay and gifted and civilized being who is now the husband of the lustrous Irene Bordoni. Goetz and Berlin, who had written more than one song in the chance partnerships of Tin Pan Alley, had become, and to this day have remained, the warmest of friends. There is probably no one whom Berlin more admires or whose companionship he so enjoys.

The marriage of Dorothy Goetz and Irving Berlin followed within a few weeks after their first

meeting. He was twenty-three and she was only twenty when they sailed for Cuba on their honeymoon. It was there she fell ill of the typhoid from which she died five months after the wedding. The last fortnight of her life was spent in the apartment in the Chatsworth there at the foot of Riverside Drive which had been festively prepared against their return to town. The doctors and the decorators were jostling each other in the hallway of this shiny new home, while the anxious bridegroom was locked up in the front room trying ludicrously to fulfill his contracts for jaunty songs long over-due.

A week after it was all over, the understanding Goetz picked his new brother up bodily and carried him all over Europe in an effort to pull him together. When, after a long absence, he was seen once more on Broadway, everyone said he was himself again. But the folks at the office knew better. For the songs he brought in had no health in them. He tried to turn out jolly things about grizzly bears and bunny bugs and all the fearful menageries of the dance floor of the day. But the tunes were all limp and sorry.

Then one day he left on the publishers' desk an-

other kind of song. The writing of it seemed to have effected a kind of release, for immediately he turned out three of the most profitable things he ever did, breaking all his own records with a thumping music-hall masterpiece called "When that Midnight Choo-choo Leaves for Alabam." The song which opened the dykes was "When I Lost You." He had had to write it. It gave him his first chance to voice his great unhappiness in the only language that meant anything to him. Priests with an ancient wisdom and doctors with a new science could both have told him why the writing of it brought him something like ease.

It is probable that he was acutely embarrassed when this, the first song of his heart, proved an immediate popular favorite. It droned from the hurdy-gurdies and its refrain sifted through the windows of every honkey tonk in America. Unblushing tenors used it to wring the easy hearts of the two-a-day. It sold more than a million copies. It made a shining heap of dollars for the troubled youth who wrote it. There must have been times when he wished he had let no one hear it.

It is also probable that some puzzled onlookers

peering in from another world were of so little understanding that they could see only a celebrated character of Tin Pan Alley trying to sell his incomunicable woe at twenty-five cents a copy. They might have understood a little better—don't you think?—if they had thought a bit on that best of all the French legends, the fable which all of us should read every year, the tale of the Jongleur of Notre Dame.

That is the story of the dusty, strolling player, who, when he was taken with a sickness, was left behind by his wandering troupe in the care of the gray brothers of a roadside monastery. He was still a shaky convalescent in their charge when the feast day of the Virgin was to be celebrated. Then the great folk of the countryside brought their offerings of fine gold and gleaming jewels to the feet of Mary. And the monks, each according to his talent, laid their gifts on her altar—sweet chants on which they had rehearsed for months, fine carvings and exquisite missals that had been the patient and loving work of many an expectant day. And in the background the little clown was sick at heart because he had nothing to give.

So, when the gray brothers were at the refectory, he stole into the chapel to do his best for Mary. A monk, coming in at the moment, saw him doing his poor repertoire of juggling tricks. Also he danced a few gay steps and turned some cartwheels. In the language of a latter-day minstrelsy, he was strutting his stuff. The horror-struck witness of this desecration, muttering a hundred jumbled notions about bad taste, went panting for reinforcements. He came back at the head of a very regiment of disapproval, but no monk interfered, for on the threshold of the chapel they were halted by what they saw. The carven figure of the Blessed Virgin was bowing as if in benediction. She was smiling, too. And, as some of them told in wonder afterwards, the smile seemed made of amusement and affection and pity and pride, all blended. And the chapel was filled with a light that is not on land or sea.

CHAPTER VIII

YAPHANK

WHEN America was sucked into the world war, the song writers of Tin Pan Alley fairly outdid themselves in hymning the glory of battle, the majesty of America, the dauntlessness of our soldiers, the nobility of dear France, the infamy of Germany and the considerably exaggerated desire to go over the top. Even Berlin so far forgot himself on one occasion as to write a now forgotten ballad entitled "The Voice of Belgium." But before long, he too was in the army and once there it was given to him to write the song which came closest to the affections of the doughboys themselves.

While sundry sheltered spirits shod in patent leather and pearl-gray suede looked up rhymes for Château-Thierry and devised choruses which should express this stern young country's grim determination

to fight to the bitter end, Berlin was learning close order drill in the dust and heat of Camp Upton. And if he did not so completely master the intricacies of "left front into line" as to endear him greatly to the scornful drill sergeant, it was partly because his truant feet were really moving to the measures of a song that was spinning in his head—a song that whole convoys of troops were soon whistling in the ports of Bordeaux and Havre and Saint Nazaire and humming as they hiked resentfully along the white roads that led to the war.

This was a jocular but honest dirge attuned to their most familiar mood—a mood the English called grousing but for which we had the more vivid word "belly-aching." It was the song which came nearest to expressing the state of mind common to the four million who had been clapped into olive drab. The pious stalwarts from Iowa, the rangy fellows from Montana (who kept chanting a mysterious litany about a certain Powder River, a mile wide and an inch deep), the tatterdemalion Irish from Father Duffy's parish and those from Colonel Logan's jurisdiction down South Boston way—all these did not have much in common.

They were of many minds about the war and France. And about Germany, of which remote entity, as a matter of fact, they thought very seldom. Certainly not many of them hated Germany. But one thing they did hate. One thing became the symbol of all that was dull and tyrannical and uncomfortable in the army. That was reveille.

All told this "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" was, it seems to some of us, the best and truest thing that America contributed to the song-book of the war. Its only considerable rival was the fine, quick-stepping, confident recruiting song called "Over There" which was George M. Cohan's work. This was a spirited martial tune written to words which assured the staggering Allied armies that America was coming up the road. And it further announced to a doubtless quailing enemy that "we" would not come back till it was over "over there." It was, in short, a piece of heroics and one which seemed to lose something of its savor with every mile that Hoboken receded into the distance.

In France, except as a disembodied tune, the song seemed a little silly, inasmuch as there was

no time when a popular vote taken in any regiment in the A.E.F. would not have led to an immediate decision to sail for home whether it was "over" over there or not. Indeed, the best and most battered of the regiments spent all their spare time basking in the comfortable delusion that they were about to be recalled to America as a reward of merit. The doughboy, always a little sheepish about heroics and preferring his own whimsical way of showing the gumption that was in him, could not stomach such stuff when he was riding in a foul-smelling and verminous "Chevaux 8; Hommes 40." Then would he rather complain to Heaven and his gallantry took instead the form of lifting most of his complaint only when things were really all right with him. The typical American soldier, whose notion of chivalry was to be facetious when things were pretty bad, could hardly have adopted such a song, for instance, as that "America, I love you" which enormous blonde contraltos were rendering so vehemently in the vaudeville theaters back home. Penrod would as soon have risen in the yard at recess and sung a hymn to "Dear Teacher."

And to the doughboy, the writing of such a song

as "Over There" was too comically like the courage of the city editor in the story they used to tell about Chapin of the New York Evening *World*—the celebrated Chapin who was a terror to reporters for twenty years before the twilight of his life when, as a convicted murderer, he settled down in Sing Sing as the head gardener of that institution. Once this tartar sent a young cub out to find a whirlwind Westerner who was believed to have arrived furtively in town after a romantic and unlegalized elopement. The cub, after tracking the fugitive couple in quest of an interview, sent in by telephone from a corner saloon the first result of his scouting expedition. There was, it seems, no interview to be had. Indeed, at the mere suggestion of such a thing the Westerner had thrown him down stairs and, from the top step, had further assured the unhappy scribe that if he came nosing around there again, he would get a bullet or so in his heart. At such high-handed treatment of the press, Chapin was justly indignant. Indignant, but not daunted.

"You go back to that young man," he said firmly, "and tell him he can't intimidate me."

It was an extremely uncomfortable and secretly

reluctant private in the United States Army who wrote "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning." For it was the inexorable draft law which had plucked Berlin out of the rich ease of his house in New York and deposited him in barracks at Camp Upton. The board's bland acceptance of him had come as a disagreeable surprise. For all his own doctors had insisted that no army would take him as a gift. Indeed, for years he had writhed with a nervous indigestion which had led him from doctor to doctor and made him the profitable plaything of each new specialist arriving in New York. Most of his songs, always postponed to that last minute and then turned out in a kind of frenzy of application, had been written by a small composer twisted with pain. This was so well known that whenever his neighbors in Tin Pan Alley saw him looking especially wan and spent and frail, they would exclaim bitterly: "Ah, hah, another hit I suppose!"

Wherefore no one who knew him at all thought of him as a likely soldier. And it was only because he was, after all, a youngster still hanging on to his twenties that Mr. Tumulty grew vague and looked the other way when Berlin called at the White

House to offer his services in some non-military capacity. He wanted to serve as a jongleur camp-follower in France where already his old crony Elsie Janis was sending him urgent messages to come over and join her.

After these anxious preliminaries the draft board's decision came as a painful shock—a shock largely forgotten in the immediate necessity of adjusting himself to life in camp. This experience had its appreciated compensations for some of the coddled fellows whom the war dumped suddenly back into the common stock. There were many men borne to camp in motors quite as magnificently upholstered as that which deposited Private Berlin at the front gate of the army. And to many of them the need of roughing it came as a welcome change and their discovery of a common brotherhood with their neighbors from the streets and mines and factories gave them a little human decency which they will never quite lose in this life. Of course an occasional gloomy sensitive like the Dos Passos who wrote "Three Soldiers" felt only distaste and, one guesses, he would have felt the same distaste at the vulgar, jostling mob that might share the bleach-

ers with him during a World Series. But many a young fellow who had been brought up at Groton and Williams College, say, made in the barracks the discovery that some ornery lad with no grammar was just about the grandest person that ever lived—the grandest person and the finest gentleman. Which discovery, we may hope, has done him (and indirectly all of us) a lot of good. But such a discovery did not have to be made by one who had grown up in the swarming gutters of Cherry Hill. And there was no new romance of democracy in the proletarian barracks of Camp Upton for one who already had served his time in the sheetless dormitories of the Bowery.

Berlin did not greatly mind the uneventful food, though there was a twinge waiting for him every time he got long enough leave to dart back home and discover by the good things in the larder how far more fatly than himself his valet and his cook, like all other civilians, were faring in his absence. He did not greatly mind the drill, though no one who has already painfully wrought an instrument for his hands likes to have another thrust into them—another which can only worry him with a forgotten

sense of incompetence. He did not even mind the officers though not all of them were too busy to be anything but decent. There were two kinds of officers who were peculiarly trying to such enlisted men as Irving Berlin. One was the bounder kind whose first thought was: "I guess this guy think's he's going to run things here. Well, we'll show him he's no better here than anybody else." It is just as well for the future development of American music that no lieutenant of this type was strolling past the barracks the day that Irving Berlin's valet came down to see him and, finding him out on the drill field, seized the occasion to make up his bunk and polish up the quarters round about it. The other kind of officer was the parvenu whose first thought was: "Well, well, the poor fellow's way beneath me now. I must be very gracious to him. I must put him at his ease." Of course neither was a gentleman. And bacteria will get them both in the end.

Berlin ran into enough specimens of each variety to goad him into writing after the armistice one of the two best demobilization songs to the strains of which the four million came scuffling home. Of

these two, one was that jaunty and sagacious ballad with the refrain:

How're you going to keep him down on the farm
After he's seen Paree?

The other, which was Berlin's, was the gleefully vindictive piece entitled: "I've Got My Captain Working for Me Now."

No, it was not the food nor the drill nor even the silly caste system of the army that most afflicted Private Berlin. What he hated was this monstrous business of turning in shortly after dark and being routed out at the very time when, during most of his life, he had been accustomed to drowsing off. Berlin is a nighthawk and nighthawks are born, not made. They may read the articles in which learned doctors point out that a man is at his best at high noon. The nighthawks know better. Every little brother of the lamp knows that he is never really himself until midnight.

Even as a kid in Cherry Street, Izzy Baline had craved the night hours, drinking tea like a true Russian until he was chased under the covers. He knew that this world was bitterly at odds with him

when he would be hauled from those covers at day-break and prodded on his way to Park Row so that he might have a bright and early start in answering the Help Wanted advertisements. Bright and early! Why, the words simply do not belong together in the phrase book of the nighthawks. The busker's life was the life for Berlin. He loved the dawn as much as the next man—but only as a rosy glow coming at the end of a perfect day. At Nigger Mike's he was on duty until eight o'clock every morning and when he escaped to Broadway and could work when and where he pleased, he at least carried with him old Mike's notion as to which hours ought never be wasted in the miniature suicide called sleep.

So when Berlin came in time to buy and shape for himself a home on one of those giddy thoroughfares to which he had so often delivered telegrams in his fugitive days as an A. D. T. messenger boy, he arranged its clock to suit his own rhythm. The tapestries and inlays he might well leave to someone who knew about such things. He might allow someone more literate to select the books for his elegant new shelves. But at least it must be

such a house as would let a body drop off to sleep about six o'clock in the morning.

In that house he has done most of his work in these later years. It is a menage so ordered that all its staff vanishes shortly after midnight and from cellar to roof there is no one left to move or fret if, at four o'clock, say, or better, five, the old piano begins to adventure with the cadences of new melody.

In so soft a nook, to be sure, he could hardly have written the best of his war songs. That could only have been written by one who had stood in line in the rain for mess and who knew what it was to hate a bugler. But it took such a pampered nighthawk as Irving Berlin had been really to find words—words and music—for the emotion of his generation on the subject of reveille.

The melody of that song, of course, made full use of the challenging notes of the bugle call as indeed did "Alexander's Ragtime Band" of old, but it naturally could not confine itself to those notes. Indeed on that limitation one of the best of all the war stories turns. A magnificent colonel, on the prowl in his domain, came upon the buglers at practice and suggested, in a sultanic manner, that they

amuse him by learning to play "Over There." They explained nervously that this was impossible as the bugle did not have all the notes with which Mr. Cohan's piano had been blessed.

"Well," said the high command, baffled for the moment, but a soldier and a colonel to the last, "keep on trying."

The verse of Berlin's bugle song contained the following ironic preliminary:

I sleep with ninety-seven men
Inside a wooden hut.
I love them all,
They all love me,
It's very lovely
BUT

and then the refrain:

Oh, how I hate to get up in the morning,
Oh, how I'd rather stay in bed,
But the hardest blow of all
Is to hear the bugle call:

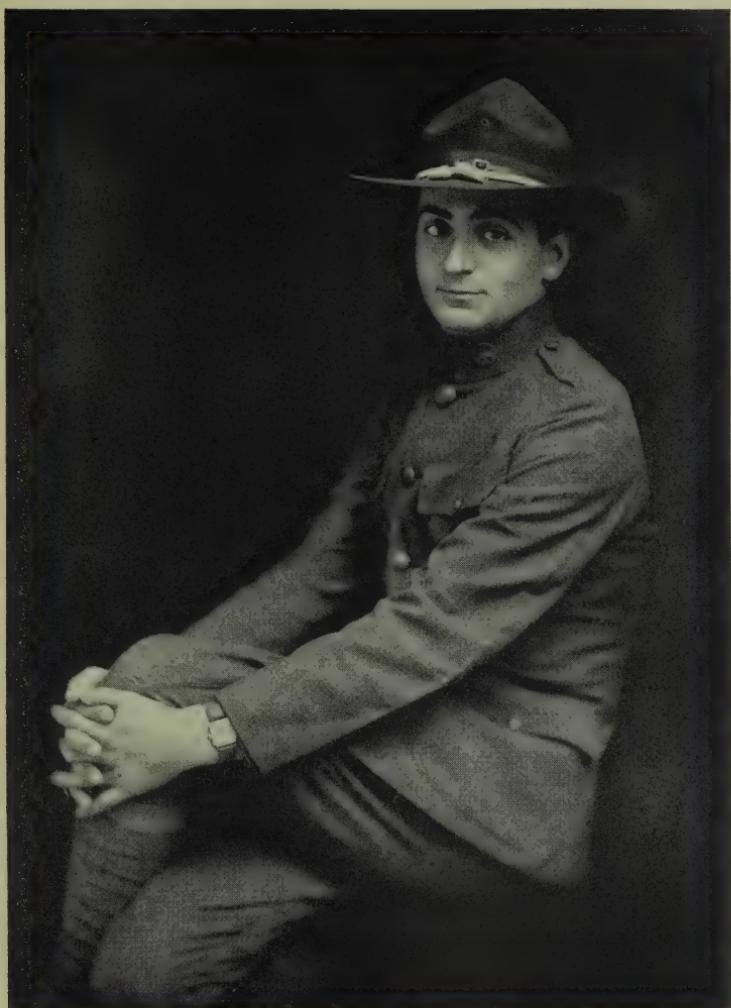
You've gotta get up,
You've gotta get up,
You've gotta get up this morning.
Some day I'm going to murder the bugler,
Some day they're going to find him dead,
I'll amputate his reveille
And step upon it heavily
And spend the rest of my life in bed.

The sentiment, you see, was so mutinous it is small wonder that the first officers to hear it were exceedingly ruffled and thought that the singer should be immediately committed to the brig. Fortunately the decisions in such weighty matters were infrequently left to lieutenants.

In all the army there was probably no soldier who at some moment as he groped for his breeches in the chill dark did not wonder vaguely why it was that the bugler himself never by any chance overslept as any normal, undemonic mortal would. Wherefore it was the final couplet of the chorus which delighted most of us beyond words, the couplet which ran:

And then I'll get that other pup,
The guy that wakes the bugler up
And spend the rest of my life in bed.

“Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning” was first proffered as part of the revue called “Yip-Yip Yaphank” of which the lyrics and music were written in that anxious summer of 1918 by Sergeant Berlin and of which the cast was all drawn from the ranks of the transients at Camp Upton, by this time



"OH, HOW I HATE TO GET UP IN THE MORNING!"

a way station for replacements which the convoys were moving overseas as fast as their engines would carry them. The show was a joy to rehearse because it was not among the privileges of the troupe for any sulky member to flounce off the stage and resign. It was a joy to hear because it had youth and melody and thunderous voices and no libretto at all. So hardened a playgoer as Robert Benchley reports that he never had such a thrill in the theater as that moment when the huge company receded from the vast Century stage and, left alone there with his scrubbing pail, Berlin's thin, shy, plaintive voice rose in this refrain:

Poor little me,
I'm a K. P.
I scrub the mess hall
On my bended knee.
Against my wishes
I wash the dishes
To make
this
wide
world
Safe for democracy.

That was one of the three chief songs in "Yip-Yip Yaphank." Another was the delightful tune called

"Mandy," which afterwards was demobilized into the ensuing "Ziegfeld Follies," where it was so fetchingly sung by the lovely Marilyn Miller that it soon wore itself out on a million phonographs.

"Yip-Yip Yaphank" ended with the overseas call, the spectacle of a great transport looming out of a foggy bay and the final sight of numberless soldiers shouldering their blanket rolls and marching up the gang plank. As a matter of fact, most of the chorus which roared out that finale sailed before the week was out, some never to return.

Sergeant Berlin wrote "Yip-Yip Yaphank" at the behest of the late General Bell. Probably he was guided largely by the same impulse which made each soldier contented when he found out, to his surprise, that the army could make use of his trade. Perhaps in the back of Berlin's mind there lurked the idea that if he became an indispensable figure in General Bell's staff he would never have to carry a gun. Certainly that score and especially the reveille song were the immediate result of his own efforts to escape the tyranny of the top sergeant. If he could be assigned in his off hours to work on a soldier show, if he could be detailed to work at

night on a piano which would, of course, have to be isolated in the midst of a sleeping camp, why then, maybe he could be isolated with it and would be allowed to sleep on in the morning as a privileged character. Thus, indeed, it came to pass and any old timer of the regular army would have grinned at so familiar a spectacle, the true soldier's foxy search for a little comfort and a soft detail.

But for that matter, Berlin had become a songwriter at all not because, as far as he was aware, a torrent of pent-up melody was pressing within him for an outlet. He became a songwriter by successive flights from the dreary work his new country offered him. He had achieved worldly success before he was twenty-four but not by high resolve and resolute determination. Not at all. He reached success by caroming off the obstacles which his world presented to him. And his real reason for writing one of the best songs wrought in America in our time was a means of defeating the top sergeant.

This accidental triumph is, in all probability, and for various reasons, the only American song of the last great war that is likely to be taken up and carried along the roads by the soldiers of our next and

greater war against which we muddleheads of today have yet to take our first step. There was only one other lay which the men of the A.E.F. sang so often or liked so well. That was an equally disgruntled and unheroic lament of unknown and possibly multiple authorship which usually ran something like this:

In the army, the army,
The democratic army,
Your uncle clothes and feeds you
Because your uncle needs you.
Beans for breakfast,
Beans for dinner,
Beans for supper time.
Thirty dollars every month,
Deducting twenty-nine.
In the army, the army,
The democratic army,
All the Jews and Wops,
And the dirty, Irish cops,
They're all in the army now.

A friend from overseas came back after it was all over, to tell Berlin that this impassioned lyric was the only one which rivaled his own in the favor of the doughboy. At which rivalry Berlin could afford to smile, because at least they had used his melody. For that mutinous lyric was always sung to an old

tune of his—the music of the piece called “In My Harem.”

During the war, Berlin, as composer-in-chief of the United States Army, was paid a monthly wage of from \$30 to \$40 a month. After the armistice, of course, the continuing royalties from the songs came to him. The reveille song alone sold something like 1,500,000 copies. But he had no share in the \$80,000 profit which was cleared by “Yip-Yip Yaphank.” Since the war he has sometimes permitted himself the civilian luxury of wondering whatever became of it.

CHAPTER IX

THE SALE OF A SONG

IT was in 1919 that Irving Berlin walked out for the last time from the offices in the interest of which he had put aside the old tray and napkin and started in as a songwriter. The house for which he toiled had derived its chief prosperity from the tunes that life was always shaking out of him. And for some years, as a partner in the firm, he had shared in that prosperity. But a deal of chafing and exasperation must have attended the rising fortune, for finally out he walked taking with him his old crony of Tin Pan Alley, Max Winslow.

This story could be written in the terms of certain abiding friendships and one of those would be the fire-tested alliance between Berlin and the man whose chief business and chief enjoyment in life has been the selling of his songs. The two of them will argue till the edge of dawn, debating this move or that

with such bitterness and such vehemence that the buckwheat plates rattle on the marble table tops in Childs'. But the rising sun has not yet failed to see them walking off arm and arm through the streets of the waking city.

Long ago Winslow, who had started in as a drifting singer in the cabarets of Broadway, settled down to that branch of exploitation which is known to the trade as plugging. When the small Baline was engaged at \$5 a week to join in the chorus from the balcony at Tony Pastor's—that was plugging. The mobilizing of such assistance is Winslow's work. Year in and year out he busies himself with the task of putting the new songs quickly into the hands and larynxes of the two-a-day. But his great flair lies in his faculty of recognition. They say of him that no one along Broadway has a surer, keener ear for a popular song and many a chorus of Berlin's has been rewritten before publication because that wary troubadour, when first he sang it to the listening Winslow, did not see his crony's face light up as he had hoped it would. At first he hung up his hat in the thriving office of Harry von Tilzer and devoted himself to infecting folk with the songs which that

composer was then turning out in great numbers, among them the celebrated "Down Where the Wurzburger Flows."

Another was a jaunty thing called "Are Ye Comin' Out Tonight, Mary Ann?" and one day Winslow bounded into the office to report that when he had dropped in at Nigger Mike's in Chinatown the night before, he had heard the waiter singing a parody of "Mary Ann" which set all the patrons of the Pelham to pounding on the tables by way of approval. It was not a printable parody, Winslow admitted, but it had cleverness and he was of the opinion that the waiter who had improvised it would be a handy person to have around a song shop. He proposed that the boy be engaged forthwith at a salary of \$15 a week. But Von Tilzer was not interested in the suggestion and the anxious waiter down in Chinatown, instead of receiving a flattering summons to Broadway, was allowed to linger on there until Nigger Mike threw him out.

But the negotiations had struck a spark of friendship between Berlin and his advocate. That arch plugger, Winslow, had been so eloquent in his praises to Von Tilzer that he found himself believing all he

said. The two friends soon split the cost of a shabby room on the edge of Union Square and by the time Berlin was writing his first successes for the house of Watterson, Winslow had already moved his hat over to that house and was belligerently prepared to cram each song down the throats of New York. And when Berlin decided at last to walk out of the Watterson domain, the departing clatter of Winslow's feet on the stairs could be heard not long after his favorite composer had slammed the door.

With great self-questioning and trepidation, most of which now seems inexplicable to the onlooker who has the advantage of knowing what happened next, the genius of Irving Berlin was then incorporated. He ceased to be a mere person and became so many shares of common and preferred stock. And in bold gold letters a new sign reading, "IRVING BERLIN, INC.," shone in the sunlight of Tin Pan Alley.

It is no great break in the tradition of Broadway that a writer of songs should publish them. The cheery, neighborly Paul Dresser, who was once the sunniest vagrant on the sidewalks of New York, took more than one turn at the publishing of his own works. So, always, did Charles K. Harris,

whose "After the Ball" was so great a favorite in the days when everyone was singing "Annie Rooney" and "Sweet Marie," the song of which the accent has made it permanently impossible for Americans to pronounce the French name for Mary. Jerome Kern is a not conspicuously silent partner in the firm of T. B. Harms & Co., which markets the songs he writes, and of course the aforesaid Von Tilzer has always been a publisher.

But the most striking example of all is that frail woman out in Chicago who wrote "The End of a Perfect Day" which has made a larger fortune and sold more copies than any song of which there is any record. When her husband died, Carrie Jacobs Bond was left to shift for herself and for her small son. Soon he was scuttling about Chicago as a delivery boy and she was trying to keep a roof over their heads, first by taking in lodgers and then by painting china. It was when her hands grew too shaky for such work that she took to writing songs. And when, one after another, these little tunes and verses were refused by the established publishing houses, it was Jessie Bartlett Davis who advanced the \$200 with which, when it was added to the \$300

that remained in her bank, Mrs. Bond set up in business for herself.

At first her dining room was the only office and you must picture the mother and son—who, by the way, has since gone into the candy business—wrapping and addressing the first song-books and toting them to the post office as orders trickled in from the sentimental piano-racks of Chicago and the lake country. It was after this small enterprise had begun to expand that Mrs. Bond wrote “The End of a Perfect Day,” a song that has outsold even “The Rosary” and in its fourteenth year had passed, according to the sworn statement of her agents, the unprecedented mark of 5,000,000 copies, roaming the world with its pensive melody and available, if you are so minded, for everything from choirs to saxophone. It may be guessed without too great intrusiveness and without too gullible a swallowing of advertised figures that this one gentle tune has made considerably more than half a million dollars for the woman who wrote it.

This fantastic success of Mrs. Bond’s is an afflicting thought to all the song folk of Broadway. Every music publisher tosses on his pillow at night when

he thinks of the lost chance represented by that indomitable woman who turned out home-made songs as other widows turn out home-made peach jam or home-made ginger cookies. And the song writers are visited now and again with a gnawing envy of one who not only received the royalty on each copy—that might vary with any song writer from two to eight cents a copy—but all the profit as well. When Mrs. Bond got into difficulties with printers' bills and paper bills during the first year of her venture, a friendly doctor down the street took a tenth interest in it by advancing her \$1,500. He has made a profit of more than \$100,000 as a result of what was meant to be only a genial gesture.

But your song-writer, in reflecting on these depressing figures, does not always pause to count, too, the work and the worry that were Mrs. Bond's portion, nor is he likely to look squarely at the fact that, in all his days, he might not happen to write an "End of a Perfect Day." So, light-heartedly, he becomes a music publisher and his friends notice a little later that he is growing gray at the temples.

There are not too many discouragements in the way of his impulse. There must be many novelists

who secretly itch to print and peddle their own books, but, since Mark Twain's flights into the business, none of our writing men has been his own publisher except the agitated and prolific Upton Sinclair. The publishing of a book, however, is a far more arduous, expensive and dismaying task than the publishing of a song. It took, as you see, only \$500 to set Mrs. Bond up in business.

Far behind the impulse as it manifests itself sooner or later in every song-writer's emotions, is the feeling that the man who writes a song receives far too small a share of the earthly reward paid for such a benefit to the community. If you loiter much at the headquarters of the American Society of Composers and Authors—the crushing official title of the song-writers' defensive guild—you will find the place murmurous with legends of fortunes made out of songs, but not, mark you, by the men who wrote them. You will find the dark corners haunted by the ghosts of men who wrote something for all the world to sing but who, themselves, died hungry. Go out to dinner with a group from this guild and by the time the coffee is served, you will find yourself depressed by a notion that all song-writers die

starving in the garrets of America while all publishers and makers of piano rolls and phonograph records drive by in their scented limousines, laughing heartlessly.

You will hear how, in his early days, the innocent and defenseless Sousa wrote march after march for a publisher who paid him only the nominal fee due him for making the band arrangement. Under that contract, he was paid \$90, the legend says, for the incomparable "Stars and Stripes Forever" to which two generations have stepped happily along.

You will hear, too, how Hart P. Danks received only \$15 for his song called "Silver Threads Among the Gold" which was first made popular by the lugubrious tenors of the minstrel shows and then, after years of neglect and dust, knew suddenly the rare experience of a second spring. It is a touching legend but one difficult to reconcile with the indisputable fact that his family was eventually embroiled in fierce litigation over the royalties which must have gone to them, at least in the second spring. Danks himself, long estranged from his wife, did die poor and lonely. Twenty years ago they found him in a shabby lodging in Race Street, Philadelphia

—a copy of his old love song clutched in his dead hand, a bit of paper near by on which he had scribbled, “It is hard to grow old alone.” When, in 1924, Mrs. Danks died in a Brooklyn rooming house, it was too much for the newspapers. “Under sullen gray skies that breathed an unsung requiem yesterday,” ran one fairly typical account, “they laid to rest in New Union Field, the aged, withered body of the woman whose beauty and devotion fifty years ago inspired her husband to write a famous American love song.” It made a better story just to overlook the disconcerting circumstance that the words to “Silver Threads” were not written by Danks at all. Eben E. Rexford wrote them.

Then you will hear—for this is one of the favorite legends of Broadway—that Paul Dresser, the leader of them all thirty years ago, was buried in a Potter’s Field. It does not happen to be true and the only sources of the legend are the fact that for some time his grave was unmarked by any stone and the fact that in the years just before he died Dresser knew misfortunes which kept him an embarrassed fugitive from the Broadway that had known him as its most lavish and most shining figure.

Dresser comes vividly and lovably to life in the brief, gentle portrait of him written fondly by Theodore Dreiser—the kid brother “Thee” whom Dresser used to pilot proudly from bar to bar in his daily pilgrimage along Broadway. Dreiser, by the way, wrote the verse and chorus from which Paul wove the song called “On the Banks of the Wabash.” If you read the chapter on his brother Paul in “Twelve Men,” you seem to hear the jangle and laughter of the gay midway which, in the middle nineties, reached no further uptown than the almost suburban Forty-second Street. You catch the sheen of sunlight on the twinkling hansoms and hear again the clop-clop-clop of hoof on asphalt. Then, bubbling with laughter as he went, jubilant because that was *his* song the hurdy-gurdy in front of the Gilsey House was playing, gay because he knew everybody and everybody knew him, equipped with the latest naughty story brought in from the road and bound that he should be the first to tell it in all the gathering places from the dressing-rooms over at Weber & Fields’ Music Hall to the smoke-hung bar of the old Hotel Metropole—that was Paul Dresser. And as you watch him make his way



SAM H. HARRIS

triumphant through the applauding riffraff of his day, you know that if he died with all his pennies spent, it was not because he worked unrewarded at his trade. It was because he had ever been one who could not keep his pennies if anyone along his path stopped and asked him for them. Now, after many years, his fellow songwriters seem to be remembering that openhandedness of his and they have gone down into their own pockets for money to send out to Indiana and help build something in stone that will stand as a memorial to him there "on the banks of the Wabash."

More telling, it seems to me, than this cloudy legend of Paul Dresser and a nameless grave is a happening that seemed to form a final verse to a song we all of us know. It befell during the sweltering Democratic Convention that was held in New York City during the summer of 1924. The sulking McAdoo delegates made their way to Madison Square Garden each day through the jostling streets of a city in which all the natives seemed possessed with the one idea—that their own Al Smith should be the next President of the United States.

Berlin was among those who shared this hope—in

memory perhaps of the days when Al Smith got down off his truck and went up to the legislature in Albany to represent the district of which Chinatown was a part. In memory, too, of the time when Max Winslow was going to be married and Berlin negotiated with Smith, then acting President of the Board of Aldermen, to perform the ceremony. In the hope that this other pride of the old East Side would be nominated, Berlin was ready with a campaign song—his hat tossed in the air. Its lyric expressed the conviction that all the boys and girls

From Maine to Texas
Would mark their x's
In the Democratic circle for Al.

But the song was not published and, presumably, there was never any notion that it could spread fast enough by word of mouth to set the convention a-humming it. Indeed it looked at first as though that convention were in no mood for a tune. In vain the stupendous Anna Case, all white garments and a picture hat, stood on the platform, singing into an amplifier and waving her arms with would-be infectiousness. She tried "The Star Spangled Banner," but, while the delegates were willing to

rise for it, they would not (or perhaps could not) sing it. They even seemed to resent vaguely the ease with which Miss Case assaulted the song's inaccessible high notes. She tried, then, to arouse them with the magnificent "Battle Hymn of the Republic." But it was not homely enough for so ornery and so shirt-sleeved an assemblage. Finally, after she had given it up as a bad job and it began to look as though no song would be adopted by that convention, some preposterously unofficial person—a reporter perhaps, or a messenger boy—began to hum a tune which spread as flames catching in dry grass.

East Side, West Side,
All around the town
The tots sing Ring-a-rosy,
London Bridge is falling down.

It moved across the acres of hot, coatless delegates. It agitated even the pretentious people in the boxes. It swept the galleries. The listening streets heard it and carried it across the city. One had the illusion that an old song had come down out of the garret, lifted Al Smith to its shoulders and borne him triumphantly through his town.

Boys and girls together
Me and Mamie Rorke
Tripped the light fantastic
On the sidewalks of New York.

In remote cities, young folks, listening in over the radio, took to whistling an old favorite and to demanding it in records and sheet music until every store in America was emptied of the song in twenty-four hours, while among their fathers and mothers, one wonders what memories were set astir, what rueful thoughts of an America that used to be.

And while this song was making this unheralded return to the streets it celebrated, it occurred to some intuitive city editor to look about for the man who wrote it. Charles Lawler was the name given on the original copy. Was he still living? Did anybody know? A reporter went forth and found him. He was over in Brooklyn, a buck and wing dancer, a hoofer of the two-a-day waiting for his turn to go on in an out-of-the-way music hall. In the dressing room, as he bent to fit on his clogging shoes, the reporter told him all about his triumph. It was news to him, for he had no associations with any such new-fangled contraption as the radio and

he had not read the newspaper accounts of his second blooming at the convention across the river. In fact, he could not read them. He was blind.

One of the reasons why Lawler was still dancing a breakdown in his declining years was the inequitable circumstance that he received—if, for once in a way, the inevitable legend should happen to be true—only \$100 for the song that made him famous. Of course all such figures of any bygone day must be read by one who keeps in mind the changing value of money. If you hear merely that Milton received the sum of twenty pounds (in instalments) for his “*Paradise Lost*,” you know little about that celebrated transaction unless you also know how much food and raiment £20 would buy in the Cromwellian London of his day. If you recall merely that the white settlers induced the Indians to part with Manhattan Island for \$24 and another valuable consideration in a bottle, you have a somewhat too high idea of Nordic shrewdness unless you figure out with paper and pencil just how many millions that purchase price, had it been banked at compound interest, would amount to after an accumulation of three

hundred years—to say nothing of the rise in the value of whiskey.

But aside from such merely coloring considerations, a perceptible change has actually come over the song world since the days when "The Sidewalks of New York" was new on the piano racks. Outright sales were far more characteristic of that time than this. It was a vagrant time, a sketchier, more innocent time. Your actor who was minded to tour the country would saunter in the afternoon sunlight of Union Square, booking his troupe with the manager from Louisville, Kentucky, say, or the manager from Montgomery, Alabama, if he chanced to meet either worthy on the curb. He might come home at sundown with his entire tour roughly sketched out on the back of whatever envelope had happened to be in his pocket. The song-writer went to market as informally. He would prowl the bars where the publishers might be taking their ease and was not always above suggesting that he would write a world-shaking hit for the first one who proved enough of a plunger to buy him a long Tom Collins.

It was a big day when Jimmy Thornton received \$35 for writing "When You Were Sweet Sixteen."

Such successes as Von Tilzer's "My Old New Hampshire Home," "You'll Get All That's Coming to You," and "The Stories That Mother Told Me," were published in the years when he and Andy Sterling used to peddle their songs down Union Square way, sometimes parting with them at the rate of two for five dollars.

Since then a royalty basis of payment has grown more common and the composers' guild is vigilant to keep a standard contract in vogue even for the defenseless beginners. But the greatest change is not in the scale of living nor in the melting hearts of publishers. It is rather the slow growth in an appreciation of the fact that when a man makes a melody he is making something that is definitely his. It belongs to him almost as completely as the shoes belong to the cobbler or the cake to the baker. The baker cannot eat his cake and have it, too, but that is the only restriction.

A recognition of the rights which the author, the poet and the composer have in the imponderable commodities which they fashion is a comparatively recent step in the history of private property and the gradual growth of that recognition is still in

progress. The composers have maintained such rights as they have only by fighting stubbornly against recent assaults. It was not until 1910, for instance, that a statute was finally passed acknowledging some small part of their natural interest in the phonograph records and piano rolls which can their melodies as factories can tomatoes. It was not until then that the corporations involved were duly instructed to pay down two cents for each record, over the division of which magnificent booty the publisher, lyricist and the composer must quarrel in private. Under the same law the motion picture houses are supposed to pay something for the use of the music wherewith they make bearable the unfolding of the silent drama. They are supposed to pay ten cents a year for each seat in the house as a sort of tribute to the muse of melody, and, under this law, something is also due the composers from the cabarets—a source growing negligible since the Volstead law drew the curtain on candid night life in America.

It was to the defense of this statute that the composers rallied in the spring of 1924 when an effort was made to amend or interpret it in such a

way that the cause "for profit" would not compel the radio stations to pay anything for the use of the tunes with which they thread the sky. The rallying took the form of a trainload of musicians—everyone from Berlin and Kern to Victor Herbert and Charles K. Harris—who advanced on Washington armed to the teeth with statistics. With such reinforcements the assault was repulsed for the time being and in the early weeks of 1925, the skirmishing was resumed in Congress with the Authors' League taking the offensive.

In an article in the *American Mercury* which gave tactical details of this skirmish, Harry B. Smith, the librettist of "Robin Hood" and a hundred other comic operas, quoted one Senator as exclaiming to a composer: "Why, Mr. X., you should not expect to be paid for your music. God gave you your talent and your work belongs to the world. You should be proud to have your songs sung by the people. You should be above asking for payment for them."

In that same article, Mr. Smith painted a somewhat impressionistic portrait of Victor Herbert dying from overwork in his sixties, continued the

old legend about Paul Dresser and a pauper's grave and wound up by saying:

There are just two composers in America who are making large incomes at present. One happens to have several successes in the musical comedy line. The other is part proprietor of a theatre and has his own publishing business.

To anyone at all familiar with the fortunes of melody in America today, even if he did not share Mr. Smith's exalted notion of what constituted "a large income," there could be no doubt as to the identity of the two composers meant. The first was Jerome Kern, composer of "Sally," "Oh, Boy," "Very Good, Eddie," "Good Morning, Dearie," "Stepping Stones," and many another of the most charming scores written in America in the last ten years—or, for that matter, ever written in America. The second, of course, was Irving Berlin.

All of Mr. Smith's lament runs directly counter to popular legend, for it is one of the fixed notions in the creed of the man in the street that all song-writers are men of colossal fortune matched only by the tidy sums popularly accredited to the Morgans and Mr. Henry Ford. Thus you have two legends,

one that all song-writers die in the poorhouse and the other that they all make millions. The truth lies somewhere between. Perhaps it might be better to state explicitly that Berlin, the most successful of them all, has, even in the period since he took control of the conditions under which his songs are marketed, never received in a single year more than \$160,000 as a song-writer. That income, to be sure, does not include his royalties from his revues as they accumulate weekly at the Music Box and on the road. Nor does it include his third of the profits of the publishing house that bears his name.

As a contrast to the tales of other days that have been tucked here and there into this chapter and as a clue to the proportions between the various sources of royalty which a latter-day song can depend upon, I give here a table of figures which roughly outline the life history of some of the more recent songs selected at random from his long catalogue:

<i>Title</i>	<i>Duration of Sale</i>	<i>Sheet Music</i>	<i>Piano Rolls</i>	<i>Phono- graph Records</i>
"You'd Be Surprised"	50 weeks	783,982	145,505	888,790
"Say It with Music"	75 weeks	374,408	102,127	1,239,050
"Nobody Knows"	70 weeks	1,143,690	62,204	843,062
"All By Myself"	75 weeks	1,053,493	161,650	1,225,083

As you see, some scattered numbers in the song books of the world have outsold anything ever written by Irving Berlin, but the total sales of his melodies has unquestionably exceeded that of any other songwriter of our time or any other time. His royalties, for instance, on the four chance songs listed above, must have come to more than \$170,000. The dimensions of any one success of his have been exceeded by such favorites as "The Rosary" or "The End of a Perfect Day." The arresting factor in his story is rather the great number of his successes, his shining contrast to the youngster who wrung the heart of his time with a song called "The Long, Long Trail," and then was obliged (or perhaps merely content) to let it go at that. The striking thing about Berlin, from the viewpoint of his wondering neighbors in Tin Pan Alley, is not the fact that he wrote "Alexander's Ragtime Band," but that he followed it with a long succession of equally far-spreading songs, the fact that thirteen years later—a good ten years, by the way, after it had been generally predicted that he must be writing himself out—his "What'll I Do?" was selling faster and reaping greater rewards than any song he had ever written.

That plaintive wail was published in the early spring of 1924, and by the end of the year more than a million copies of it and more than a million records had already been sold. Then in January, when Berlin had gone to Florida to look for some sun, he listened in on that night when, for the first time, such singers as John McCormack and Frances Alda lent their voices to the radio. And he found another kind of warmth in the fact that each of them had chosen a song of his to sing. Alda sent "What Will I do?" out into the air, and McCormack chose "All Alone"—"All Alone," which had started falteringly in October, but which, in this one month of January, broke all records by selling more than three hundred thousand copies. Probably if you could look into that secret part of his heart where Berlin keeps his well-concealed vanity, you would find that his pride is not that he can set the feet of his generation a-tapping but that he can keep on doing it—again and again and again.

Berlin, whether considered as a phenomenon of Broadway or as a force of nature or as a spring of melody or as a master of rhythms, is best understood by one who realizes that he wrote not one but all of the following songs:

- ✓ "Alexander's Rag Time Band"
- ✓ "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning!"
- ✓ "When I Lost You"
- ✓ "Say It with Music"
- ✓ "What'll I Do?"
- ✓ "This is the Life"
- ✓ "Mysterious Rag"
- ✓ "Rag Time Violin"
- ✓ "Snookey Ookums"
- ✓ "When the Midnight Choo Choo Leaves for Alabam' "
- ✓ "You'd Be Surprised"
- ✓ "He's a Devil in his Own Home Town"
- ✓ "I Want to Be in Dixie"
- ✓ "At the Devil's Ball"
- ✓ "When I Leave the World Behind"
- ✓ "He's a Rag Picker"
- ✓ "I Want to Be in Michigan"
- ✓ "Somebody's Coming to My House"
- ✓ "The Grizzly Bear"
- ✓ "They Were All Out of Step But Jim"
- ✓ "In My Harem"
- ✓ "My Wife's Gone to the Country"
- ✓ "Call Me Up Some Rainy Afternoon"
- ✓ "That Mesmerizing Mendelssohn Tune"
- ✓ "Sadie Salome, Go Home"
- ✓ "Dorando"
- ✓ "Wild Cherry Rag"
- ✓ "Sweet Italian Love"
- ✓ Lyrics and Music of "Watch Your Step."
- ✓ "I've Got My Captain Working for Me Now"
- ✓ "All By Myself"
- ✓ "Nobody Knows and Nobody Seems to Care"
- ✓ "Mandy"
- ✓ "A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody"

- "Tell Me, Pretty Gypsy"
- ✓ "Girl of My Dreams"
- "Some Sunny Day"
- "Everybody Step"
- "They Call It Dancing"
- "Pack Up Your Sins"
- "Crinoline Days"
- "Lady of the Evening"
- "An Orange Grove In California"
- "Waltz of Long Ago"
- "Lazy"
- "All Alone"

"Oh, Mr. Berlin," cried a pretty girl at an afternoon tea into which he had strayed by mistake, "I guess there's no one who has written as many song hits as you have."

Probably his mind ran back to the days when he used to dash off several songs a week. Probably he thought, too, of the long catalogue which contained so many efforts of his that never made any impression whatever. At any rate he smiled at the pretty girl and answered:

"I know there's no one who has written so many failures."

Nowadays he writes fewer pieces, but his work is surer, truer, visibly the better for all the tunes that pop into his head only to be thrown away without

ever reaching paper. In the year 1924, for instance —the fifteenth year of his reign on Broadway—he carried only three songs up the stairs of Irving Berlin, Inc. But those three were “Lazy,” “What’ll I Do?” and “All Alone.” And no publishing house which receives three such manuscripts in a single year can reasonably complain if its chief composer spends more time than he used to lying

“out in the sun
with no work to be done”

—supine on the baking sands of Palm Beach or Biarritz.

If, as has been suggested here, there is an immemorial antagonism between the man who writes a song and the man who publishes it, you can guess something of the inner struggle which goes on in the bosom of one who plays both rôles. Amusing signs of that struggle mark all Berlin’s days in the world. It is the artist in him that writes the songs but it is the publisher in him that drags his lazy, sick, reluctant body to the piano and tyrannically bids him write them.

It may be a shock to the ingenuous to learn that



FANNIE BRICE SINGING THE "DON'T SEND ME BACK" SONG
OF THE RUSSIAN IMMIGRANT

scarcely a song in all his long, eventful catalogue was written because his heart was singing and the song could not be kept from bursting out of him. Nearly all of them were written deliberately and a little sulkily by one whose business associates stood around him in a reproachful circle and assured him that, if he did not give birth to something at once, the dear, old publishing house would go on the rocks.

The artist in him may be tickled mightily by some neat, unexpected phrase in the chorus he has just written, but the publisher in him will ruthlessly strike it out in favor of some quite routine threadbare word with no disconcerting unfamiliarity about it to stick in the crop of the proletariat.

Indeed one can see both forces playing a tug-of-war within him in the very throes of composition. The artist in him is bloated with pride when a Puccini or a John Alden Carpenter applauds the technical brilliance of an "Everybody Step," but the publisher in him is looking rather for some measures more within the grasp of the multitudinous piano-playing fingers of America.

I saw evidences of the struggle when I chanced one afternoon into his quarters at the Ritz Hotel in

Atlantic City to which he himself had just ascended, brown and sandy and rested from the beach below. At daybreak that day he had just completed the chorus of "All Alone" and the final version of its lyric, scribbled on the back of a menu card, was propped against a siphon which served for the moment as a music-rack. The old busker was uppermost in him and he was possessed to sing it forthwith. If I had not passed by at that moment, the nearest bellhop or chambermaid would have been thrown into a flutter by being pressed into service as audience. His accompanist had come down from New York to work with him on the new Music Box numbers and was already drowsing at the piano over a rough, pencilled lead sheet of "All Alone." As I recall that first rendition, it ran, either in words or glances, something like this:

*All alone,
I'm so all alone.*

(the old Russian stuff, you see.)

There is no one else but you.

(I'm growing a beard now.)

*All alone
By the telephone*

(Winslow will like this part.)

*Waiting for
A ring-
a-ting-
a-ling.*

All alone every evening

(Now listen, this is the part you'll like.)

*All alone feeling blue
Wondering
Where you are
And how you are
And—*

(Can't you see them buying it?)

*—if you are
All alone
Too.*

I do not know whether it was the artist or the publisher that was uppermost in Berlin when he was asked once what song in all the world he would like most to have written. He said "The Rosary." It was a refreshing answer to one who had grown a little weary of those cultural parvenus who consider it a showy sign of sophistication to achieve an attitude of disdainful superiority towards that world

favorite of Ethelbert Nevin's. But every publisher's ear is strained to catch the first notes of another "Rosary." For they all doff their hats to a song that is still in great demand at the beginning of its second quarter century.

It was in 1898 that Nevin wrote the melody on the inspiration of a poem by Robert Cameron Rogers which he ran across in a Washington newspaper. Since then the tune has carried the words into eight other languages. Doubtless you have heard ample Rhineland contraltos clasping their hands in a lyric agony over "Mein Rosencranz" or listened apprehensively while some slim, French tenor started out with "Nos heures intimes, ah ma cherie!" Rogers made a present of the words to Nevin who, in turn, made a present of "The Rosary" to Mrs. Nevin and since then its sale of more than 4,000,000 copies may be guessed to have brought her in something like \$275,000 and would have brought in far more than that had not the phonographs had their way with this song long before the law intervened to give the composer some rights in the matter.

It is certainly the publisher in Berlin that glows contentedly even when the statistics of Irving Berlin,

Inc., show that the banner song of that house was none of his own writing but a ballad entitled, "Tuck Me to Sleep in My Old 'Tucky Home.'" That song sold more than 2,000,000 copies and if you are one of those who never heard it, probably you are also one of those who have never seen "Abie's Irish Rose" or read a novel by Harold Bell Wright. You belong, that is, to a kind of aristocracy. For just as it was found, in a censorship of the British Army during the war, that the Tommy's favorite writer was neither Kipling nor Arnold Bennett but one Nate Goold, of whom few people in America had ever heard, so there are certain books and poems and songs that achieve less fame but reach more homes than their celebrated rivals.

It may be the inheritance of his tribe in Irving Berlin that tinges so many of his songs with the mournfulness of solitude and self-pity. But somewhere within him the voice of the publisher also whispers reassuringly that sadness is rather apt to sell better than gayety in the song market. It may be the artist in him that sings of how he wants to be in Dixie and relates melodically the nature of his feelings when "that midnight choo-choo leaves for

Alabam'." But, since that is a commonwealth to which any boy from Cherry Hill would have to be taken by main force, one suspects rather the active influence of the publisher who knows, by the sales records of a hundred years in the song market, that, since the days of "Home, Sweet Home" and "Suwanee River" no subject—not even young love itself—has quite such a wide appeal as the thoughts of home and mother and the nostalgia for the scenes of a misspent youth.

It certainly was the publisher in Berlin who leaped to the wireless house in midocean one summer when he heard a ship's orchestra play a crazy tune that affected the other passengers as catnip affects a cat. To his partners back in New York he began flinging urgent pleas that they hunt out the composers and learn—too late, as it happened—if the song had yet been bought by any other house.

That song was the lackadaisical tune with the lunatic, vegetarian chorus—"Yes, We Have No Bananas." It was written by two members of a jazz orchestra in New York and it may well be that the publisher who brought it out did so as part of a general policy of endearing himself to all jazz or-

chestras. At least he had such misgivings about it that he did not publish it under his own name. Doubtless he was as surprised as anyone when it swept the land like a medieval calamity. It is probable that no single phrase in a popular ditty had taken so firm a hold since the "What never?—well hardly ever" phrase all but unseated the reason in the days when "*Pinafore*" was new in America nearly half a century ago. The new song crossed the Atlantic more rapidly than any airship. Paris was rocked to its foundations by the passing cyclone of "*Oui, nous n'avons pas des bananes*" and across the channel a very rash of paragraphs in "*Punch*" testified to the virulence of the infection on the Strand. It is the dark suspicion that they would have rejected this foolish song if it had been submitted to them, it is the agonizing fear that its like may, for all they know, be under the arm of the next shabby stranger who seeks a hearing for his masterpieces, that keeps the partners of Irving Berlin, Inc., nervous and makes them old before their time.

Something of the nervousness of the new music, something of the jumpiness and excitement of jazz

itself, is in the very air of such a publishing house. This one occupies a loft in a low building of transitory aspect that stands at the corner of 49th Street and Broadway. It is a stone's throw from the vast Capitol Theater where its new melodies are often heard for the first time and just a step from the Palace, that headquarters of vaudeville where an Elsie Janis or a Nora Bayes may be the first to sing them.

It would be pleasant to be able to report that the new songs are prepared in a marble temple, framed against a bank of black cypresses, that velvet footed servitors lead you respectfully along stately corridors and that theplash of fountains plays a soft accompaniment to the new melodies poised for their first flight into the world. It is necessary, however, to report that Irving Berlin, Inc., is housed in an office building of such ordinary aspect that a passerby would be more likely to look on the signboard by the elevator for the firm name of Potash & Perlmutter.

You no sooner step out of that elevator when it reaches the Berlin floor than you are immediately trampled under foot by something that suggests a crowd in front of a baseball score-board, a mob scene, perhaps, in a William A. Brady melodrama, or a



THE MUSIC BOX

busy day at the gates of Ellis Island—anything, indeed, except a cluster of courtiers in the anteroom of melody.

These are the professionals—these the song-writers with ballads in manuscript, each confident that his unheard opus will sweep the land if the natural jealousy of Berlin himself does not strangle it at birth. These are the minstrels from the two-a-day—drifting in to hear whatever is new in the world of song as stockbrokers drift towards a ticker. Slim-waisted, pasty-faced lads with incredibly nimble feet who stand askew and litter the floor with the nervous butts of their half-consumed cigarettes; small, squeaky actresses of ten or twelve towed by their belligerent mothers—these are the unknowns who rub shoulders with the great folk of minstrelsy in the clamorous outer office. Probably the Al Jolson or the Nora Bayes of tomorrow is somewhere in the group.

Bits of their prattle separate out from the general hubbub:

“And I says to him, just like that, I says: ‘What I want is a song with a tear in it.’”

"And after me getting as healthy a bend as ever they saw over in that old graveyard in Newark—"

"Well, dearie, it certainly knocked Albee for a row of centre-door fancies. I was a riot, I tell you, a wow—"

Back of this, providing a kind of thorough-bass for the composition, is a strange, unending blurr of sound, bits of music seeping out from the supposedly sound-proof studios in which a new Berlin from Chinatown may be eagerly showing what melodies are in his sheaf or a new favorite from vaudeville may be having the latest ballad adjusted to her immovable voice. On the other hand, the voice you hear sifting through the keyhole may be one you recognize fondly as the voice of Grace La Rue. Or the deep boom-boom of Nora Bayes. And, as like as not, that plump and pleasing person elbowing his way through the crowded anteroom will be none other than the Lord of Jazz, Paul Whiteman. In summer time, when the doors and windows of Tin Pan Alley stand open all day long, the sidewalks underneath are clogged with stray listeners to the favorites of the coming season as they leak from the

rooms where orchestras and pianos and quartettes are trying them.

It is a ramifying and stupendous business—this far-flung enterprise which, in the complicated fashion of modern American life, has come into existence just because that waiter down at Nigger Mike's had so many tunes in his head. Saul Bornstein, the general manager who is also one of the three partners, has charge of some two hundred employees scattered through offices from Boston in Massachusetts to Sydney in Australia. He is the dynamo of the house and it is he who is responsible for seeing that the overhead does not run over \$75,000 a month. If, out of the 125 songs the house may publish in a year, four of them prove to be hits, such an overhead can be absorbed and forgotten. No easy job, Mr. Bornstein's, to keep his head when all about him folks are bursting into song, or departing temperamentally for Miami. It must be like keeping books in Bedlam.

There is so much unsuspected work to be done after Berlin, or any other composer, has brought the words and melody of his latest song into the office and left it nervously on the desk of his partners.

Its accompaniment must be adjusted by the musicians who are retained for the purpose. It must be translated into the symbols that will make it playable by everything from the piano in the front parlor to the clarinet in the roadhouse. It must be pitched to suit all the voices that ever break into song. All this, mind you, before the first copies are stacked in the music stores and before, through infinite intrigue and cajolery, the first records have been made for the phonograph.

Now it can be sold. And songs are sold to you as deliberately and as grimly as beans are sold to you. If you are under the innocent impression that the tune you whistled in your bath this morning got into your head by chance, it is only because the advertising of a song is more subtle than the advertising of baked beans and the propaganda by which you become familiar with it is less visible to the naked eye. When a new song is ready to assault the public—one let us say that the publishers think may turn into a second “What’ll I Do?”—thousands of copies are printed and stacked in readiness. Preliminary hearings are vouchsafed behind closed doors to the vaudeville singers who have been selected to sing it.

Paul Whiteman has listened to it privately and decided, perhaps, to transmit it through the phonograph with such added wails and antic trills as he alone knows how to impart to a composition. An orchestral arrangement has been sent to the Capitol Theater, whose great orchestra, an old friend of the radio enthusiasts, will, when the signal is given, make it known overnight in Jersey farmhouses and Adirondack lumber camps and fishing smacks along the Chesapeake. Then, too, in Chicago, in Detroit, in San Francisco, like greyhounds straining at the leash, the pluggers of the branch offices are waiting for the word to carry the song to every cabaret and movie orchestra in their city.

Finally the signal is given. The conductor at the Capitol lifts his baton. The song begins. The new tune drenches the country with the suddenness of a cloudburst. In an hour, a day, it fills all the air around you. The orchestra plays it when you go out to dinner and the newsboy whistles it as he fumbles for your change. The demand at the music store begins and mounts and mounts. A thousand copies a day. Five thousand copies a day. Ten thousand copies a day. By the end of the first week

you feel as if you had known that song all your life. By the end of the first month you begin to wish you had never heard it at all. By the end of the sixth month, you think you will die in horrid agony if ever you hear it again.

Then, quite suddenly, the very next week, perhaps, you find it missing from the street. The orchestra accompanies your soup with something else. There is a new tune on the lips of the newsboy. And so no more. Conceivably the composer, asking by wireless from the Riviera for the latest tidings of its sales, will receive such an answer as that which disconcerted the London playwright on the first night of his comedy's production in New York. He cabled Charles Frohman for news of how it was going. C. F. cabled back: "It's gone."

To Winslow, sitting back exhausted after such a campaign, there must sometimes come the ghost of a disquieting wonder—a vain speculation as to whether, had he not sold the song so vehemently, it might not have lingered longer, and in the final analysis, reached more piano racks and phonographs. On such occasions, he would recall that no one ever plugged "The Sunshine of Your Smile," that "The

"Rosary" and "The End of a Perfect Day" were never "sold" to America. He knows that certain publishing houses—T. B. Harms, for instance—have no professional department at all. He knows, of course, that there are certain songs which fare better if left to make their own way in the world. From such songs, when he recognizes them, he keeps hands off. And when a great popular favorite has just gasped its last at his feet, he can hardly help wondering if this had not been one of those.

Yet the very selling method is as much a part of the pace and rhythm of Berlin's music as that music, itself, is part of the pace and rhythm of America in the third decade of the Twentieth Century. Such sales are musical journalism. It is the modern way. Time was when Americans read the tidings of a Waterloo only after the mail packets had been blown across the Atlantic with elaborate accounts of the battle. Today a great Pope dies in Rome and Catholics in San Francisco cross themselves when, ten minutes later, they read the news on the bulletin boards of their city. Faster, faster, faster—it is the tempo of a time which seizes upon a song, worries it to death and throws it away—all in six months. On

to the next and the next. Perhaps, after all, it takes just such a taut, high strung, panting mechanism as Irving Berlin, Inc., to make it possible for a latter day jongleur to keep pace with the breathless people to whom he fain would sing his lay.

As you move through the crowded and turbulent passageways of such an office, you pass quickly by the shipping room, where the thump-thump-thump of the packages being wrapped recalls nothing quite so much as the rolling base of "Dardanella." So many copies of "Everything Is Rosy Now For Rosie," so many copies of "Tuck Me to Sleep," so many copies of "I'll Always Keep a Corner in My Heart for Tennessee," so many copies of "Red Hot Mamma,"—wrapping, stamping, shipping all day long.

You are likely to pause longer on the threshold of a smaller room, bleak and unadorned. Here sit the arrangers, men who, when Berlin was born, knew more about music than he will ever know. They were learned in the symbols of melody and trained in the theory of harmony when he was just a busker on the Bowery. You can imagine their sentiments. You can even guess that sometimes they smoulder a



NO. 6 BOWERY

little with the feelings that rile the faded copy-readers of a newspaper's city room when they must needs pass their nights whipping into shape for publication the stories which the dressy, helter-skelter young reporters bring in from the teeming streets.

The progress from that dreary domain to the outer offices of the temple constitutes a dizzying ascent in elegance. You pass from the kind of quarters assigned to the men who merely know everything about music (except, perhaps, how to create it) to the suaver regions dedicated to commerce, to chat of "overhead" and "fiscal year" and "net return." Winslow, sitting at his mahogany desk, might be mistaken for a bank president, if it did not seem uncharacteristic of a bank president, in the midst of a conference, to throw back his head and clinch an argument by bursting into song with what is left of a once famous whiskey tenor.

And in this ascent in luxury—as sharp in its contrast as the difference between steerage and promenade suites aboard the *Mauretania*—you come at last to Mr. Berlin's own office, a region of opalescent lamps, thick, yielding rugs and submerging divans. The magnificence is so monstrous that you would

either laugh outright or give way to a dawning resentment were it not for one saving fact. He is not there. He never is. Life has prepared a throne for Irving Berlin but he is too vagrant, too self-critical and too humorous a person ever to be caught in the act of sitting on it.

Indeed, a week, a month, a season may slip by without ever the sound of the young master's step being heard at the gate of the old estate. But his tunes linger there and work for him while something in the air of the place recalls vaguely the pleasing visit to the home of Ellis Parker Butler recorded long ago in the old *New York Sun* by the irreverent Frank Ward O'Malley. O'Malley told how, as he approached the Butler cottage on Long Island, he learned from the man who was mowing the lawn and the postman who was delivering the mail and the cook who was hanging out the dishtowels that Mr. Butler was locked in his study. They all knew he was at work on a new short story. And they all glowed with a confidence that it would prove to be just as funny as "Pigs Is Pigs." So, too, the intuitive passerby in the offices of Irving Berlin, Inc., can tell from something in the air when the absentee is

in the throes of a new tune. At such times the very twang of the telephone girl's response, the very tilt of the messenger boy's cap, proclaims the local belief that it will be another "What'll I Do?"

CHAPTER X

THE MUSIC Box

IF most of Irving Berlin's melodies have had their origin in a phrase or catchword that settled in the back of his mind and would not be exorcised by any other method, so, too, the most ambitious and the most enslaving project of his life had its beginning in three words that popped into his restless head one night before the war as he was drifting out of the Friars' Club. It was a title, for he is one who thinks in titles. Probably he first became enamored of "What'll I Do?" before a line of its chorus had been written or a note of its melody coined, because it struck him that that would be a good name for a popular song. Certainly he is the kind of person to whom the now familiar phrase "New York" would appeal as a happy title for a city and leave him, perhaps, with a vague notion that George Cohan had written it. I should not be at all surprised if he

felt a mild glow of gratification when he walks through Irving Place.

At all events on this night as he came out of the Friars' Club he ran into Sam H. Harris and, in the busker's fashion, seized upon that defenseless manager as the first audience to hear a new notion which had occurred to him on his way through the hall.

"If you ever want to build a theater just for musical comedy," said Berlin, "why not call it the Music Box?"

And went on his way to whatever bazaar in Bagdad was the end of his pilgrimage that evening. It was three or four years later in the early spring of 1920, when Berlin had just come back to town from Palm Beach, that Harris called him on the telephone.

"Irving," he said, "you remember that Music Box idea of yours?"

And Berlin, shaking the sleep out of his eyes (it was only noon) and wondering helplessly what Harris was talking about, replied in his mannerly but evasive way:

"Will I ever forget it?"

"Well," said Harris, "I have just bought a piece of land in Forty-fifth Street across the way from the

Astor and I called you up to tell you that you can have your Music Box whenever you want it."

Which casual communication, as effective in wakening the drowsy minstrel as any cold shower would have been, was the prelude to an eventful and affectionate partnership which had its real beginnings in the days when Harris, himself a graduate of the lower East Side, used to stroll down from Second Avenue, where he was president of the Hesper Club and, across the rim of a mug of beer from a corner table at Nigger Mike's, would watch with an appreciative grin the goings on of that worthy's singing waiter.

Berlin's senior by nearly fifteen years, Harris was born down at Mulberry Street and Bayard. Errand boy for a Grand Street milliner, messenger runner for the Postal Telegraph, and finally a worker in a laundry, it was Harris's notion to propose taking under contract the full responsibility for supplying an entire skyscraper with clean towels from one year's end to the other. And after he had made such an arrangement with the Whitehall Building at the Battery he was able to begin buying the racehorses for which, it seems, one can have a passion even

when one is born as far from paddocks and green pastureland as the corner of Mulberry Street and Bayard. Harris had four horses when he was twenty-one and he probably thought the world a mighty pleasant place.

It was the merest accident that turned his steps toward Broadway and bred all the experience that went into the building of the Music Box. One night over in Brooklyn, he grew enthusiastic and prophetic about a small Irish prize fighter who was boxing furiously for three dollars a bout. Harris undertook his management, put him under contract for life and devoted the next years to guiding the destinies of this belligerent youth whose name was Terry McGovern. It was the chance of profiting further by exhibiting this popular hero on the stage (in such melodramas as "*The Bowery after Dark*") that led Harris into the theater—and left him there, prosperous and happy for many years in the partnership with George Cohan which inexplicably came to an end in the fall of 1919 during the strain and bitterness caused when the embattled actors enlivened the streets of New York by walking out on strike.

The theater has an almost mystical way of taking

hold of those who would use it and making them serve it instead. It never showed its power more clearly than when it took that young entrepreneur who came up Broadway leading Terry McGovern by the hand and made him into the kind of man who, alone among all the Broadway managers, had the flair and the understanding to open the doors of his theater to Galsworthy's "Justice" when John Barrymore, then making his first venture in a tragic rôle, was waiting homeless in the suburbs for the chance of a hearing along Broadway. It was Harris, too, who undertook the production of the bold and magnificent play called "Rain," remaining sufficiently himself after that uplifting experience, nevertheless, to keep one fond and excited eye on a Kentucky racehorse of his named Sadie Thompson. As one who has lent an ear to the hopes and trials of show-folks for more than a decade, I should like to testify that there is no man in the theater whom they regard with more affection and confidence than is Sam Harris's portion on Broadway.

It was with Harris that Berlin planned the Music Box—a small, jewel of a theater that should be the chummy home of a succession of such revues as

those revels of girls and music for which America had already become famous to the ends of the earth, such revues as those to which Berlin himself had more than once contributed the songs beginning with that happy day when it occurred to Charles B. Dillingham to invite him to write "Watch Your Step" and so set afoot as gay and festive and tuneful a harlequinade as this country has heard in my day. Then Berlin had written the music for the "Follies" of Mr. Ziegfeld one year and he had contributed much to the composite score of "The Century Girl" when another gallant effort was made to find some use for that vast, yawning, hungry temple of the drama which some ill-advised Mæcenases were misled into building in Central Park West. Now Berlin's tunes were to have a home of their own.

As the ground in Forty-fifth Street was being cleared of the stubborn brownstone-front boarding-houses which had so long defied the uptown march of the Great Midway, Berlin summoned in another partner. That was Joseph M. Schenck. Schenck's story, which also begins in Russia, intertwines with Berlin's across the counter of a dingy old drugstore in Chinatown—a battered, wooden pharmacy that

still sells pills and lotions under the elevated in the Bowery near Chatham Square as it sold them a hundred years ago when this was the Bowery Lane and there were orchards and pleasant paths all about. In its backyard the base of a brass mortar, where many a generation of apprentices has pounded out prescriptions, is just the huge stump left as the memorial of a wildwood tree that used to fling its wonderful branches over the Bowery Lane.

This frame cottage, capriciously left behind long after all the friends of its youth had been pushed aside, is probably the oldest drugstore in the United States. It was launched as such in 1805 and anyone who cared to ransack the yellowing account books in its dusty attic might weave therefrom a social history of New York in the Thirties and Forties, when the doctor's sleigh would draw cosily up at the curb to drop a prescription, when plasters were spread on sheepskin and an odor of asafoetida filled the air. For in those days it was vaguely felt that unless medicine smelled pretty bad it would not do you much good.

As early as 1856 the old pharmacy was—as it is now—officially called Olliffe's. But by the time that

Izzy Baline, drifting in on the heels of Chimmie Fadden, came to shrill his ballads in the saloons of the Bowery, it was popularly known—as it still is—merely as Number Six. And it had only just yielded to popular clamor by sulkily installing a soda fountain.

Number Six was a great solace to the yellow men of Chinatown who could patter to it openly for drugs which now the law would not let them buy. As a swarm of them would arrive the clerk would pitch fifty or sixty pounds of gum opium on the counter and let them pick over it critically like the shoppers at the pushcarts down the street. And it was, of course, a kind of first aid station in that No Man's Land, sometimes busiest with a patient laid low by the baseball bat always kept handy behind the counter in case any patron should suddenly make unlawful demands upon the till. Then the tough knocked out in a street brawl or the girl slashed in some back-room altercation would be rushed by neighborly hands to Olliffe's for such bandages or restoratives as could be applied while the ambulance from Gouverneur was picking its path through the crowded streets. Berlin, racing around the corner on some

such errand from Nigger Mike's, must have run into Schenck a hundred times. For, working day and night and saving every cent to put himself through the College of Pharmacy, Schenck was the clerk at Number Six.

Many's the neighborly Mickey Finn that Schenck made out of calomel and jalap, but as it turned out, he did not long rely upon his painfully acquired knowledge of pills and powders. For, by way of the county fairs and the amusement parks such as the one he eventually bought on the Palisades opposite Harlem, he wandered into the theater. He was high in the councils of Marcus Loew when he became interested in motion pictures and started on that spectacular career of movie production in which he has been aided by the convenient circumstance that his sister-in-law is Constance Talmadge, his brother-in-law is Buster Keaton and his wife is Norma Talmadge.

It was the grateful memory of more than one good turn done to Berlin in his first investing days by the neighborly Schenck that prompted Berlin to invite him into the rosy project of the Music Box—offering him, indeed, a half interest in his own share.

Then, when it turned out—as, in a sort of hilarious nightmare, it did turn out—that the building of the Music Box was to cost, ground and all, something more than \$947,000, and when it further turned out that painfully little less than \$188,000 was to be spent in concocting the first revue before ever an audience sat down in that beautiful theater, there began to dawn on the worried minstrel the ghost of a wonder whether what he had intended as a friendly gesture to a neighbor might not, in the eyes of a dispassionate onlooker, appear uncomfortably like something else, whether, indeed, Schenck himself might not suspect that there had been an ominous overtone to Berlin's first broaching of the project when he came to his friend and said, "Joe, I want to **LET YOU IN** on something."

As the plasterers and painters were putting the final touches on the Music Box, all Broadway was shaking with laughter over the predicament of the new partners whose determination to build a beautiful theater had led to such a debauch of lapidarian construction. Rival managers, standing in knots on nearby street corners, could be seen figuring happily on the backs of envelopes and announcing:

"If they sell out every seat for the next five years, they'll lose money."

Berlin himself was worried and as he tossed in his sleep at dawn, it seemed to him that his was a procession of days in which every afternoon he stopped in at his publishing house, gathered up all the gold due him on his songs and hurried around the corner to give it to the clamorous bricklayers and masons who still cried for more. Schenck, who, in his comfortably remote California studio, was undisturbed except when he was called on tersely for an occasional check, and who, by the way, has never yet examined or even seen one of the Music Box statements that are sent regularly to his office, did not arrive in New York until the dress rehearsal on the eve of the theater's first opening. And he did not run into the fluttered Berlin until a painful moment when a trick elevator, which was to rise from beneath the stage bearing aloft sixteen ravishing but pardonably nervous chorus girls, stuck stubbornly midway and would go no further.

"What's that?" asked the naturally puzzled Schenck.

"Oh," replied Berlin in an off-hand manner, the

while he mopped his brow, "that's just one of our little effects."

At which Schenck roared with laughter, clapped his apprehensive partner on the back, and said:

"Never mind, Irving, after all it's no more than you or I would lose in a good stud game and never think of it again."

It was, therefore, a rather breathless and anxious sundown, that September day in 1921 marked for the première of the Music Box. Berlin and Harris, dressed for the opening, met beforehand at the Astor and dined together alone in a private suite hidden upstairs out of reach of all the people who would come up and noisily wish them success in their new venture. They did not say much to each other, but between meat and salad, between salad and sweet, between sweet and coffee, they would stroll with one accord to the window and look down where already the amber light of the electric sign was warming the cool, gray, lovely façade with its inset pillared portico and its boxes of trailing evergreen.

And as the moment approached for the first motor cars to begin depositing the audience at the door, they noted with surprise and an inner exhilaration

a sight that was new then to Broadway but which has since recurred perhaps a half dozen times. A crowd was collecting in front of the theater, a plain, shabby, jostling, good-humored crowd, mistakable at first glance for a queue besieging the obdurate box office, of which the ticket rack had been empty for days, but really people who had merely come to see those who WOULD see the first Music Box Revue. There would be youngsters agape at the arriving Fairbanks or Geraldine Farrar. There would be seamstresses taking notes on the fashions of tomorrow. There would be hairdressers on a similar mission. And there would be purposeless readers of the illustrated dailies, happy if they could identify someone whose picture had enlivened their breakfasts, content if they could go home that night and say that they had been near enough to Mrs. Lydig Hoyt in the flesh to reach out and touch her. By eight-thirty the mob had made the sidewalks impassable and the police were clearing paths for the nobility of Broadway. Every doorstep and window ledge within range of the theater was packed as if a parade were to pass by that evening.

It was time to go in. Berlin and Harris looked at

each other, each uncomfortable with an impulse to say something, each deciding there was really nothing to say. They shook hands instead—Terry McGovern's manager and the waiter from Nigger Mike's.

"Go to it, Irving."

"Go to it, Sam."

And off they went to the Music Box.

It was, you will remember, a great success—that first revue. For months seats were unobtainable and even after the preposterous outlay in its preparation, it showed an eventual profit of something like \$400,000. For, by the time it had run its year in New York and then gone out into the country to look for the stay-at-home dollars which had not come to it, the first revue had played to gross receipts of \$2,000,000.

So much has been said about the orgy of expense at the Music Box that it might be well to look over the books of that first revue and see just what these bespangled, multitudinous harlequinades cost and whence the bills pour in to the harried masters of a kind of native revels that neither Paris nor London has yet begun to approach. For the most part the European revues are measly and shabby enterprises,

innocent of the inventiveness and the splendor and the genuine beauty which is now the tradition in America.

The first revue, of course, had to justify the building reared to shelter it. It is the latter day custom to throw playhouses together as real estate speculations—building some of them in less than three months and running them thereafter on the candid principles of a roadhouse. But the Music Box was to be at once a home and a pride and a toy. Affection went into the fashioning of it and that is one reason why it is the most beautiful theater in New York today. That is also why for all its cosiness, it cost \$617,012. Small wonder that the wiseacres of Broadway looked up from their figuring and grinned.

"Well," said one, "I guess the boys are building themselves a monument."

"Yoh, a monument," quoth another, "a tomb."

The cost of production of that first revue was \$187,613 which was made up of such items as these:

Costumes.....	\$66,783.09
Salaries and labor bills during rehearsals.	29,020.54
Properties.....	22,614.71

Electrical supplies.....	\$10,701.85
Rental of luminous pearls.....	10,115.00
Furniture.....	1,320.21
Orchestrations.....	2,269.63
Steamship fares for missions abroad.....	2,170.00
Royalties forfeited on material unused..	3,600.00
Office expenses.....	1,525.38
Miscellaneous.....	9,278.52
Scenery.....	28,214.09

The average weekly running expense of the first season was \$19,065.86 of which a typical week's items would read something like this:

Theater staff salaries.....	\$ 2,279.10
Company salaries.....	10,225.60
Trade bills.....	1,311.81
Rent.....	2,000.00
Orchestra salaries.....	1,541.86
Royalties.....	1,378.12
Wardrobe.....	291.56
Sundries.....	128.97

But the average weekly gross receipts of the first revue during the forty-one weeks of the New York run were \$27,788.57, so the goose hung high and an even greater profit was shown nearly every week that the revue toured the country. Wherefore the wise-acres on the curb stopped laughing. And yet, in a plunging notion that they must outdo themselves

or die in the attempt, the masters of the Music Box ran the cost of the second revue beyond the quarter million mark and neither that one nor the third ever approached the profits made by the first venture.

So peculiar and so native a product as the revue staged each year by Florenz Ziegfeld or Harris and Berlin is, of course, not written as a play or a symphony is written. Rather it is concocted like a tub of mincemeat. Or brewed tentatively like a punch. Or assembled like a Ford.

The first reluctant steps are likely to be taken some six months in advance when Harris and Berlin begin to speculate hesitantly as to who and what should constitute its ingredients. One June afternoon a neighbor asked Berlin what his new show would be like and with rumpled brow he made answer:

“I don’t know yet. We’ve got Clark and McCullough and Grace Moore, but I don’t know anything beyond that.”

You will note he did not mention any dreams he himself might be having for a pageant or a bit of scenic witchcraft. He did not even speak of the blues or the ballet he himself would contribute. One who

might pardonably have considered the music the most important part of any revue—certainly of any revue at the Music Box—was enough of a showman to recognize instinctively that, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be—the rock bottom fact of any adventure in the theater is the person up there on the lighted stage. The familiar predicament described in the old stencil about “Hamlet” with *Hamlet* left out is as nothing compared with the dire disaster of “Hamlet” with John Barrymore left out.

Then, as Harris begins his parleys with the songsters and comedians and dancers who will eventually make up the troupe, Berlin begins to waken each morning heavy with the accusing consciousness that he must be bestirring himself about the melodies. If the new revue is scheduled for November, he spends July in telling himself that he MUST start on the score. To be sure, odds and ends of notions, scraps of melody, a title or two—these have been accumulating unassorted in the wild scrap bag of his casual mind. He has added to them every time he has swum out a little further than the rest, every time he has motored home alone along the

rim of dawn. But it is high time there were something on paper, something that would enable him to assure Harris, without too much perjury, that he was getting along famously with the music.

He decides that he will make no engagements for the third week-end in July, and vows that while other folks are lolling at the beaches, he, warm with self-pity, will lock himself up in the deserted city and spend forty-eight hours at his piano. By Saturday afternoon, the reproachful piano, with its row of gleaming keys in the shaded room, looks so monstrously like a leering skull that, as if in fear of its hearing him, he fairly tiptoes towards the door on his truant way to Great Neck.

After a month of such evasion, callers at his home or his theater or his office walk suddenly into the fact that he has vanished and left not a trace behind. Inquiries of the protective Ivan yield only a bland assurance that he has no idea where Mr. Berlin has gone. But the initiated look about them for some sign of Arthur Johnston, a young pianist from his publishing house, who usually serves the musically illiterate Berlin as an amanuensis. If he, too, is missing, the place to look is some high ocean-front

floor at the Ritz or the Traymore in Atlantic City. In a suite there for the next ten days, the composer of the Music Box will work steadily at the precipitation of all that has been in solution in his mind for the past idle months.

Coming up from the beach in mid-afternoon, he will lunch in his sun-baked bathing suit and then plunge into the torment of songwriting which will not be interrupted until ten o'clock when waiters come staggering in under heavy laden trays and he and Johnston can relax for dinner. Then more work until the not especially small hours of the morning. So the next day. And the next. And the next. Sometimes a week will slip by without his seeing more of the boardwalk than the bobbing procession of straw hats far beneath his windows, without, indeed, his having once put foot to leather or varied at all the luxurious rotation of bathing suit and pajamas. If he sees any one, it is because by the ancient wireless of the beach, word is passed along that Berlin is on high and such kindred neighbors as Sir William Wiseman or Al Jolson or Frank Tours will drift in at two in the morning to bring him the news of Broadway.

It is pretty comfortable, that long, dainty suite, with the sea gales tossing its curtains while, not so far away as the crow flies, Cherry Street is gasping in the heat and some small successor is trying to sleep in Izzy Baline's old corner of the fire escape at No. 330. One who peers in to see what progress is afoot in the writing of the score may feel the ghost of a pang in memory of Franz Schubert hungry in his garret, but if Schubert had lived in America in the year of grace, 1925, perhaps he, too, would have had a suite at the Ritz. And whoever says his songs would have been less sweet on that account probably knows no more about it than I do, who, at least, beg leave to doubt it.

Roughly this is the method of procedure in that elegant eyrie. Berlin will have been fiddling at his piano for weeks until he has verse, chorus and melody pretty much as he likes it. Now he plays it for Johnston, who, sitting with pencil poised in the manner of a bored stenographer, makes strange, negligent, flytracks across a scrap of paper. At the end he takes over the piano stool and plays what he has written, the while Berlin, with beach robe trailing, paces the far corner of the room, his head cocked



GRACE MOORE, PRIMA DONNA OF THE MUSIC BOX

critically on one side. Now and again he lets out a cry as though he had stepped on a chestnut burr. That is when Johnston misreads one of his own notes or even ventures to modify a phrase as a subtle bit of musical criticism. But Johnston seldom resists—relaxing himself utterly to Berlin's needs, as sensitive and as submissive as the table on a ouija board, and as appreciative, in his rôle of Berlin's first audience, as any busker could wish.

Then, once the melody is there on paper, there is the lyric to be completed and the second chorus to be written. While that is in progress, Johnston sits interminably at the piano, playing the new air forty, fifty, sixty times while up and down, up and down, now beside the piano, now striding the length of the room, now circling round and round the room adjoining, Berlin walks and walks and walks, hankering for the right word as devoutly as ever Sentimental Tommy did and, like him, crowing as he dashes to the nearest piece of paper when he thinks that he has found it.

When, at last, they pack up and start back for New York, Johnston toting a sheaf of lead sheets from which the orchestrations will be made, at

least the skeleton, the scenario for the next revue is ready. For, as in the case of all the ballads Berlin has written for the piano-racks of America it might be said that "in the beginning was the word," so, in the case of each number as he writes it for the Music Box, he has given birth at the same time to the plan and the look of its production. As he works on the melodies, the pale walls of the Ritz fade away and the California orange grove or the corner of Dutch New York or the white verandah of a Virginian home takes form before his eyes. He sees the very files and steps of the girls and boys who will one night sing the song at the Music Box. Scores of them, dancing youngsters of his own generation, are stepping ghostly there beside him as he works. The pocket full of tunes which he brings back to town are thus the starting point for all the canvas that will be painted and all the costumes that will be fabricated for the next extravaganza at the Music Box. The music is the *constant* in the problem at the Music Box. It is the only revue in America that has one.

Of course an enormous amount remains to be done even in the writing of the music, for there are

eleventh hour changes with every day's shift in cast or scheme. Besides it seems almost a spiritual necessity for such a composer to leave as much as possible for the last moment. Such a necessity is but part of the incorrigible vagrancy of those who work in any one of the seven arts. Ralph Barton undertakes to draw a curtain with a hundred and forty-six caricatures for the Chauve-Souris, and though they give him three weeks in which to do it, he employs only the last twenty-four hours of the time allotted. Mr. Heywood Broun, after a month's notice from *Collier's Weekly*, will be due with his article at the office of that magazine at noon on such and such a date. When he ambles in on the appointed morning at 10:30 the relieved editor reaches out for the script only to have Broun appeal sheepishly for the use of a typewriter and sit down to turn the piece out then and there. They say that Mozart wrote the overture for "Don Giovanni" on park benches that were carried into the theater just in time for the first performance. And at daybreak of the day on which "Iolanthe" was to be sung for the first time at the Savoy in London, Sullivan completed the overture and fell asleep

while copyists caught it from his hand and the devoted orchestra played it that night, reading it at sight from paper on which the ink gleamed wet in the light from the rack lamps. George M. Cohan has yet to start rehearsals on any play of his that had more than the first act already written and they got the last five scenes of "The School for Scandal" out of Sheridan by locking him in the theater and not letting him out until he had written them, to which anxious period the notation on the last page of the patchwork script bears witness. The notation is, "Finished at last, Thank God! R. B. Sheridan."

To which the prompter added simply: "Amen!"

As the opening night of a revue at the Music Box approaches, you have the feeling that the first audience may have to be asked to wait just a few moments in the lobby while Mr. Berlin composes the final number.

Meanwhile, of course, other heads have been bent for weeks over other factors of the revue in the making. Harris, for instance, may have taken on his own shoulders not only the engaging of all the personnel but full charge of all the comedy sketches

which are selected out of hundreds sent in from every hall bedroom in New York. At first the artful Willie Collier had charge of the Music Box laughter but he used to complain bitterly that his authority was not extensive enough. He was oppressed by the tons of scenery which marked the first two revues and grew particularly indignant over such protracted interludes as that famous one, afterwards copied in Paris, wherein an entire dinner was staged with each dish from salt shaker to demi-tasse embodied by a chorus girl dressed accordingly.

"If I'd really been in charge," said Collier, gloomily, "that dinner would have been cut down to a sandwich."

In the end the favored sketches are usually those which the comedians themselves have brought with them out of the two-a-day or the burlesque wheels or their own backyards. Thus the Fourth Revue was rendered hilarious, even during rehearsals, by the banter that took place between Bobby Clark and a large cinnamon bear who was but replacing a lion that had played the same scene a thousand times with Clark in the burlesque halls from New York to San Francisco. Such sketches in a revue

have nothing whatever to do with the musical numbers, which themselves are not sufficiently related really to entitle their entire sequence to the use of the operatic "score." The American revue, as it has been painfully evolved out of B. F. Keith by Florenz Ziegfeld, is just a kaleidoscopic succession of ballets, songs, pageants and the like, with interludes of comedy tucked in (and for the same reason) like walnuts in fudge.

But while a Hassard Short or a John Murray Anderson may be rehearsing the musical numbers and a Reynolds may be at work on the exquisite pageantry of the costumes, the Clark Robinson scenery must be made—that orange grove, that Southern home—and, once made, must be fitted somehow into the intricate mechanism of the Music Box stage, a process so laborious and so complicated that, night and day for weeks on end, the stage is always in the bland possession of mechanics who putter there with such deliberation you suspect them of an inner ambition to see that the revue shall not open until two years from the following March—and not then if they can help it.

Meanwhile, from the stage thus preëmpted, the

rehearsals of the mere talent have been driven to seek shelter where they may—on top of a Fifth Avenue bus, if necessary. The comedians will be going over their sketches, as like as not, in the smoking lounge beneath the auditorium whence issue sounds of smothered laughter from some quickly suppressed onlooker who may have drifted in at a moment when Fannie Brice and Bobby Clark, exhilarated by each other's presence, were indulging in magic flights of improvisation.

Uptown, in a dance hall, the chorus will be at work, incredible shoals of shining, dewy youth, tumultuous, irresponsible, charming. The girls are clad for the most part in bathing-suits, or still briefer wisps of cambric rompers, explained and made severely matter-of-fact by their prosaic name of "practice-clothes." Their supreme unconcern, as they drift and eddy in knots of casual beauty, seizing an odd moment, perhaps, to practice the split or to stand rakishly with one foot on the piano top, is matched only by the unconcern of those about them. And you find yourself wondering if it is here as it is at Huyler's where a crafty management permits each new clerk to eat his fill, knowing

that after a few days the most luscious bonbons will no longer interest him.

As you enter, the sight of the bare dance floor, rendered spasmodically populous at intervals by an order for the rehearsal of this number or that, suggests nothing in the world so much as a Sophomore Hop and you find yourself hoping that not all the cards have been filled. But from such agreeable reflections, the abstracted John Murray Anderson if he is the director, hurries on his way, dropping in first, perhaps, at a costumer's, where a few tufts of hair are pulled out at the discovery that the fabrics for the queen's ballgown in the second act have not even been dyed yet, much less cut and sewn and fitted. Then on to a little shop tucked away surprisingly among some dreary buildings—garages and such—at the foot of West 29th Street. There, though you would never think to look for its like in so bleak a thoroughfare, is as old and personal and charming and old-world a place as you will find in all New York. It is the Siedle Studio and in it are fashioned most of the unpurchasable things that are called for in the producing of plays along Broadway.

There they made the head of the lion that protected Mr. Shaw's *Androcles*. There they wrought the barnyard harem of Maude Adams's "Chantecler." And the implausible baby that was clasped throughout one Belasco season to the bosom of *Marie-Odile*. And the papier-maché melons which, with stray bits of apple tucked here and there for the actors to nibble at, were served nightly in the agonizing dinner that made up the second act of "The First Year." For no property man that ever lived would have willingly fed real melons to actors for two whole seasons.

Into this crowded, humming workshop—where one man will be weaving the wire framework for a future stage rose garden and his neighbor will be patiently making a tail out of white Yak hair brought in from Russia—Anderson, anxious about the "Alice in Wonderland" ballet, comes charging to see the head of the White Rabbit, the ears of the drowsy Dormouse, the sad mask of the Carpenter (with glycerine tears the size of pears) and the round, sterterous masks of the Tweedle Brothers—Dum and Dee.

Then back to the Music Box, where, as the open-

ing night approaches with leaden feet, two questions seem to separate out from the jumble of hope and worry and prediction.

Everyone is asking which, of all the numbers in the score, will be the one with the unknown and indeterminable ingredient that will carry it swiftly to Moscow and Rio and Vancouver. Already the practice pianos at the various rehearsal points have been playing the music behind closed doors for several weeks and shreds of it are always adrift in the air of the Music Box. Probably a visitor who had nothing else to do could sit in a corner and make a sound prediction just by noting which tune the girls are most likely to be humming as they get into their street clothes, which tune the stage carpenters are whistling as they slowly wield their hammers on the stage.

When the Music Box was building, Berlin set his heart on writing at least one song that would serve at once as a dedication of his house and, in the event that that house ever settled and mellowed into an institution, as a sort of anthem for it always. He called it "Say It with Music," and when it was done, though the opening of the theater was yet

months away, he was so hungry for the sound of an orchestra playing it that he could not resist lending the manuscript to the Jazz players of the Sixty Club. They promised to play it only one night, but it proved so infectious that in no time the melody had seeped out and drastic measures were required to prevent its growing stale before the building of the Music Box could catch up with it.

Then every one is asking the still more crucial question as to when the new revue will open. For information on that score you slip past the guards into the Music Box, expecting by this time to find the evidence there under your eyes, the chorus regimented, the pace of preparation swift, the whole troupe taut. But they are still sitting around. They are always sitting around. While two masters of the revels confer gravely for twenty minutes about the exact flare of one unimportant skirt, fifty lesser persons sit around. You would swear you were in the waiting room of the Grand Central Terminal did it not seem unlike its patrons to dawdle there in one-piece bathing suits. The amount of time wasted in such dawdling is beyond belief and, as you watch, you are visited with a vague suspicion that the man-

agement of such enterprises do not really know their business any better than most publishers and most colonels know theirs. You finally decide that there will probably be no revue at all, but the voice of an old-timer in your ear is reassuring.

I summon one such as witness—none other than Robert Benchley, the not infrequently elfin dramatic critic of *Life*, who forfeited his amateur standing throughout one entire season by appearing as the monologist of the Music Box. He writes me in this wise:

BOOST ELEVENTH AVENUE Committee
Headquarters, 599 Madison Avenue.

DEAR MR. WOOLLCOTT:

It has been called to someone's attention, and he has called it to mine, that you are writing a book about Irving Berlin. I suppose that it is all right for you writers to write books, but I don't see how you can handle such subjects as Irving Berlin's association with the Music Box without some help from us stage-folk. Unless you have seen a rehearsal or have tripped over things back-stage, you can't know what a big thing it is in which this little man finds himself each year.

Nothing could be more discouraging than a rehearsal shortly preceding the opening of the Music Box. Out front there are perhaps a dozen men with their hats on, each sitting on as much of an aisle seat

as he can uncover from the big sheet which spreads out over all the orchestra chairs. The house is dark except for what crazy lights come from the stage. Some one yells up to the top balcony for Otto to throw on his baby spot. Otto doesn't hear. Some one else yells, and with much sputtering of calcium, the wrong spot appears. Then three people yell. Silence again.

"All right, now!" shouts the director. "All the tiger-skin girls on stage, please!" The tiger-skin girls, who have been waiting since eleven P.M. (it is now three-thirty A.M.), walk on in their sleep and stand there. Some one plays the first four bars of the music on a piano and is stopped. "Just a minute, please!"

A stage-manager walks across the stage and talks to an assistant. "All right with your straws," he yells to somebody. The director climbs up on the stage with the stage-managers. "All right, now! Music, please. All ready, tiger-skin girls!"

The pianist plays seven bars and is stopped again.

Then a little man in a tight-fitting suit, with his hands in his pockets, walks on from the wings. He looks very white in the glare from the footlights. You almost expect to have him thrown out, he seems so casual and like an observer. They don't throw him out, however, because he is Mr. Berlin.

You are suddenly overcome with a feeling of tremendous futility. "Irving Berlin's Fourth Music Box Revue" it already says in the lights out in front of the theatre. And Irving Berlin is so little. And the Fourth Music Box Revue is so big. And so far from articulation.

Yet on the opening night, not a week from the rehearsal, you won't feel any futility about it. If

you are back-stage you will, if you can keep your head from being caved in, be impressed with nothing so much as the tremendous accomplishment of something out of what seemed to be nothing, or worse than nothing, chaos. Way up above in the flies there are men set there for no other purpose than to drop things on you. All across the floor are ropes and wires especially constructed to trip you up. Dozens of men, displaying a fine disdain for the show and the performers, manage to work things so that you out front think that the curtains are being drawn back and the drops lowered by electricity. And somewhere in the jam of young ladies dressed as the various manifestations of Springtime, and young men in cutaways who throng the entrances, you may see the top of a small head. If you watch the fedora hat move up and down you can tell that its owner is chewing gum. Then he walks out and goes up to the last row of the balcony where he sits with Sam Harris and watches the show.

For four months he has been working day and night, writing music, devising numbers, engaging principals and chorus, and having a terrible time with his digestion. And yet in all that time no one has heard him raise his voice. And in all that time no one has been hurt by him.

Now you know why you can't get it all from the front on opening night, all of the Music Box, or all of Irving Berlin.

Yours,

ROBERT BENCHLEY.

But in the final week, when it becomes apparent that the new revue cannot possibly ring up its cur-

tain on the night appointed, the pace of preparation does not quicken visibly. If anything, it seems to slacken, and threatens to stop altogether, its lull before the storm broken only by Eddie Mendelssohn hurrying down to ask every one to sniff the air and see if he has caught just the right perfume for the springtime number. Or by the press department explaining patiently over the telephone that even if Mr. Thus-and-So owns eight banks and has fourteen blood relations in the Social Register, there are, after all, no more seats for the opening to be had.

Knowing, as perhaps you do, that each night's postponement means a loss of more than \$8,000, you feel a sudden pang for Sam Harris who, after running the treasury, directing the comedians and pacifying the temperamental, must lose half of every penny lost. Indeed you set out to look for him with that lively interest in a fellow creature's distress which marks the best of us. And if he isn't down in the lounge quietly seeing that the girls get all the sandwiches and coffee they need at the improvised buffet, you can trace him by his laughter to some corner of the dusky auditorium where Fannie Brice will be regaling him with reminiscences of the sad-

day years before when she, as a wistful applicant for a place in the chorus of "The Talk of New York," was fired by Sam Harris because George Cohan had said she would do better to go back to her kitchen.

At last the great night comes. In the wings the singers, the comedians, the chorus girls strain at the leash. All New York makes a monstrous effort to get into the Music Box at once. There is a ripple of expectancy as Tours rises in the orchestra pit and taps with his baton. The lights in the auditorium go down, the glow gathers within the proscenium arch, the curtain rises. And up in the last row of the balcony, Harris and Berlin decide, after all, to go on living.

Then a few days later, with the line unbroken at the box office and the new tunes spreading to the restaurant orchestras of the town, Berlin, a spent minstrel asking for nothing but some warm place to sleep, goes crawling dejected off to Florida. Unformed in his thoughts is a mild wonder at the monstrous changes since the simpler days when he would write a song at sundown, sing it in Maxim's at midnight and start in next day on another. Instead, a great, gleaming mechanism—intricate, costly, heavy

—has been reared to stand between him and the folk for whom he sings. He sees himself as one sentenced to hard labor who really has no need to toil at all, as one chained fast to a machine when his every right and impulse was to roam the world. And in the scowl which such thoughts beget, the newsmongers of Broadway read all the tip they need and straightway the papers are whispering with rumors that Berlin will never write or stage another revue.

Were such witnesses to linger longer they would probably hear him chuckling suddenly to himself when he realizes, as he must, that after all it was he himself who fastened those chains upon him. If, in the gloaming of such ancestral thoughts, he sometimes sees the Music Box as a ravenous dragon sitting ever at his doorstep, and devouring all his strength and all his tranquillity, he soon has a lucid interval in which he faces the luminous truth that the dragon was none which had chased him out of the forest. Rather it was one which he himself had sallied forth to capture, one which, proudly and exultantly, he had led home and ostentatiously tied outside his door. But, then, that's what we all do.

CHAPTER XI

FINALE

IN the knowledge that there should be at least some testimony here bearing on the place of Irving Berlin in the history of the music of his time and country, this chronicler is disposed to summon to the stand witnesses whose word would carry more weight than his own. It is a natural impulse, perhaps, to summon first such a critic as Gilbert Seldes, who, in the pages of *The Seven Lively Arts* has written much and enthusiastically on the compositions of Irving Berlin. But the roving eye plucks from the first paragraph such a sentence as this:

Ragtime is not, strictly speaking, time at all; neither is *tempo rubato*: and eminently safe composers have been known to score their music *con alcuna licenza*, etc., etc.

So I turn from Mr. Seldes, influenced by a faint, heretical suspicion that he may not know

what he is talking about and certainly controlled by a conviction that, any way, Berlin would not.

A more obvious witness to call would be John Alden Carpenter, not only for his indisputable distinction as a composer, but because of the special interest revealed in his contribution to that symposium conducted by *The Etude* when an international jury of twenty-six (ranging all the way from Galli Curci to John Philip Sousa) was asked to nominate the greatest masterpieces of musical art. In addition to the B-Minor Mass of Bach, the Seventh Symphony of Beethoven, the "Carmen" of Bizet, the C-sharp minor Polonaise of Chopin, the "Pelleas et Melisande" of Debussy, the "Boris" of Mousorgsky, the "Petroushka" of Stravinsky and the "Meistersinger" of Wagner, Mr. Carpenter added the "Pinafore" of Arthur Sullivan and the "Everybody Step" of Irving Berlin, explaining in a footnote that in his Berlin and Chopin choices, he would have willingly substituted any one of a half dozen masterpieces by the same composer.

Furthermore, Mr. Carpenter went on record as saying:

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I am strongly inclined to believe that the musical historian of the year 2000 will find the birthday of American music and that of Irving Berlin to have been the same.

Wherefore I submit this letter from Mr. Carpenter:

I am delighted at the opportunity you offer me to make some sort of public gesture of appreciation of Irving Berlin's contribution to American music. My feeling is simply this,—whether you like it or not, and wherever it eventually leads us,—the sensitive student of musical development in this country must surely recognize the fact that our contemporary popular music, inadequately labeled "jazz," is the first spontaneous musical expression of the United States of America and as such deserves attention. And it is my own conviction that if we do not offer this music our attention voluntarily, it will just naturally reach out and take possession of us anyway. To my mind, the importance of Berlin lies not only in the fact that he is pure gold, but also in that he must be regarded as a pioneer.

From the standpoint of Art, it will be interesting to find out if the charm and vigor of jazz can be successfully diluted with the sophistication of the trained creative impulse. In any event, I do not see how it can be ignored by any American composer who feels his native soil under his feet.

Then I have sought an opinion from Jerome Kern, not only as Berlin's most successful neighbor on

Broadway, but as one who, more than any other in that turbulent neighborhood, knows his way about the history of music. This is Mr. Kern's letter:

I once delivered myself of a nifty. It was at a dinner in London, and I was asked what, in my opinion, were the chief characteristics of the American nation. I replied that the average United States citizen was perfectly epitomized in Irving Berlin's music. I remember I got this off quite glibly, just as if I had thought of it on the spur of the moment. Of course, I enlarged upon the notion and went on to explain that both the typical Yankee and the Berlin tune had humor, originality, pace and popularity; both were wide-awake, and both sometimes a little loud,—but what might unsympathetically be mistaken for brass, was really gold.

Since then, columns have been written about Berlin and his music. Learned expressions like "genre," "con alcune licenza," "melodic architecture," "rhythmic pulsations," etc., etc., have been hurled at the head of modest, shy, little Irving, to his utter bewilderment.

He has been called (by myself) a modern disciple of Aristoxenos, who, as you undoubtedly do *not* know, attacked the Pythagorean theory by asserting that the ear was the only authority in determining consonance and dissonance. I must explain that my Grecian dip was in answer to some highly unsuccessful musician, who was bold and foolish enough to criticize, mathematically, and harmonically, a little treasure of Berlin's,—"A Pretty Girl Is Like A Melody."

And all the time this highfalutin' bombardment has been going on, Berlin has entrenched himself in shell-proof, impregnable position as commander-in-chief of all the purveyors of American light music.

Something snappy should be interpolated at this point to the effect that there is but one legitimate aspirant to the heights occupied by Irving Berlin, the maker of music (if, by any metaphorical stretch, a bomb-proof dug-out can be called a height), and that aspirant is Irving Berlin, the maker of verses.

A critical appraisal of his technical ability as lyrist, must be left to my literary superiors, but I, here and now, bend the knee in recognition of Berlin's genius in providing himself with his own lyrical inspiration for melodic invention. For, almost invariably, it is *after* his word-phrases and rhymes occur to him, not before, that he tackles his music. Then ensues real composition in the fullest sense of that much abused word; and Berlin has certainly mastered the art of making an integral whole by uniting two different elements. Not, mind you, by aimlessly fingering the key-board of a pianoforte until something agreeable is, perchance, struck, but by the same means that Richard Wagner employed in fashioning his dual masterpieces of text and music.

Berlin (like Wagner, an inexorable autocritic) molds and blends and ornaments his words and music at one and the same time, each being the outgrowth of the other. He trims and changes and refashions both, many times and oft, but nearly always, strives for simplicity,—never elaboration. He is not bothering much with the seats of the Olympians, but he *is* concerned with the lore, the hearts, yes,—and the dancing feet of human folk.

The comparison between the craft of Wagner and Berlin is not a heedless one, and in anticipation of indignant protests, I now go further and say that, to my mind, there are phrases in Berlin's music as noble and mighty as any clause in the works of the Masters, from Beethoven and Wagner down.

When you remember how the latter used to sit in a darkened room, for hours at a time, waiting for a fragment of melody, sometimes of only two or three notes, to come to him, you will agree with my notion that even Wagner would have considered the heroic first three measures in the burthen of "That Mysterious Rag," heaven-sent material. My openly expressed enthusiasm for these five or six notes has amused no one more than Berlin himself. He thinks the theme is pretty good, but any suggestion that it possesses a sheer musical magnificence makes him laugh himself to death.

Much is to be said about his amazing ability in the use and manipulation of rhythms. Abler men than I in that interesting field, are better equipped to speak authoritatively, but I certainly object to the absurd implication that Irving Berlin is an explorer, discoverer, or pioneer in what is still childishly called "ragtime."

He doesn't attempt to stuff the public's ears with pseudo-original, ultra modernism, but he honestly absorbs the vibrations emanating from the people, manners and life of his time, and in turn, gives these impressions back to the world,—simplified,—clarified,—glorified.

In short, what I really want to say, my dear Woollcott, is that Irving Berlin has *no* place in American music. HE IS AMERICAN MUSIC; but it will

be by his verse and his lovely melodies that he will live and not in his diabolically clever trick accents.

I hope to goodness he never asks me what the Pythagorean theory is, because I don't know much about it myself.

Mr. Kern's testimony comes closer to that which I myself would have wished to give had I been called to the stand. It avoids the preposterous fashion of using the word "jazz" and the word "Berlin" as interchangeable terms. As the man who took ragtime when it was little more than a mannerism of the pianists in the rathskellers and bordellos and made it into a custom of the country, there must, of course, be a chapter on Irving Berlin in any history of the new music. For jazz is ragtime gone daffy. But one who says that much ought straightway add the fact that, for all his knack at the modern rhythms and all his swift response to the nervous accents of his hour, he has within him as his dearest possession a fundamental sweet melody that is as remote from (and as defiantly independent of) all that is meant by the word jazz as anything in this world could be.

"All that is meant by the word jazz"—a large order, that. For any discussion of jazz is made



IRVING BERLIN IN 1924

maddening by the circumstance that there will be as many meanings of the word used in the discussion as there are persons present. By *jazz you*, for instance, may mean less the ribald and rowdy caricature which a sufficient uproar of catcalls among the saxophones and muted trombones may make out of any composition. You may have rather in mind that nervously emphasized syncopation which expressed so well the debauch, the spree, the jag on which the whole world was minded to go when the great guns ceased firing. But your neighbor will be thinking only of the fantastic instrumentation achieved in the mad orchestras. Then I have heard a distinguished musician use the word *jazz* as a synonym for "popular music" and another use it as a synonym for "pep."

At first glance, Mr. Carpenter's choice of the intricate, novel and mannered "Everybody Step" out of all the good songs Berlin has written, seems but part of a general tendency which someone has described as "the effort to make a good woman out of jazz." It is a gesture governed by the same impulse which urges Paul Whiteman in his more ambitious concerts and which has stirred the Metro-

politan Opera House to call upon the young composers to write a jazz opera for performance in that orthodox temple.

The spokesman in that call, of course, was Otto H. Kahn, chairman of the Metropolitan's board of directors, who might have been suspected of speaking *pro domo*, since his son was leading a jazz orchestra when scarcely out of knickerbockers. The invitation specifically mentioned Jerome Kern, George Gershwin and Irving Berlin, recognized as leaders in the fashioning of what has been hopefully described—at rather close range—as America's first original contribution to the music of the world. And if anyone, on hearing Kern say that Berlin *IS* American music, is then so fatuous as to object on the grounds that he was born in Russia, it might be pointed out that if the musical interpreter of American civilization came over in the foul hold of a ship, so did American civilization.

That American opera is on its way, but this chronicle is written by one who doubts if it will be written by Irving Berlin. He is a creative ignoramus. He is—really there is no other word which accounts for him—a genius. He came into the world with an

unrivalled capacity for inventing themes. But to that birthright he has added little of the art, the patience, the interest in form, and the musicianly knowledge which could elaborate them.

It is an injustice at once to his true achievements, to his deepest aspirations and to his honest unpretentiousness to link his name with a Wagner or Rimsky-Korsakoff, when his true comrade in the long annals of music is rather that cobbler poet of Nuremburg or Rouget de Lisle or, better still, any one of those nameless minstrels of France who sang a while and died unsung, but who left behind them such deathless things as "Au claire de la lune," "Aupres de ma blonde" or "Malbrouck s'en va-t'en-guerre." Rather should Berlin be written of in terms of his own predecessor—a lesser troubadour as characteristic of his sentimental day as Berlin is of his. That was the Stephen Foster whose bequest was "Suwanee River" and "My Old Kentucky Home." I am sure Berlin would be happiest if he could write a song, which like these, would become part of the folkways of his country. Only our grandchildren will know for sure, but I am inclined to think he may have written it already.

In time his music will be heard from the Metropolitan's stage. There is small doubt of that. But it will be heard after other men, with less inventive genius perhaps but with far greater musicianship, have picked his tunes up from the streets and transmuted them into opera as Moussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakoff rifled the treasure chests of Russian folk music to make their finest scores, or as Lizst for his rhapsodies and Brahms for his dances used melodies already old and dear in the fields of Hungary.

When the ghost of Irving Berlin walks this land a hundred years from now, it will step a little more proudly at the sound of some Berlin tune sounding magnificent from the orchestra pit of the Metropolitan. But it will, I think, be a still prouder ghost if it hears a farmer humming that tune behind the plow or, better still, a newsboy whistling it as he dangles his feet over the edge of a New York wharf.

This, then, is the story of Irving Berlin. It has been set down by one who was at least not unmindful of the difficulties of telling it aright. To begin with, one cannot blink the fact that Berlin has been a success and it is hard to keep his story free from the pattern and the patter of those narratives of pros-

perity with which our tables are overcrowded—those complacent narratives in which multimillionaires tell us how they got that way without, bless their hearts, ever thinking to mention the part that luck may have played. Perhaps it would have been better frankly to have accepted the title proffered by the waggish paragrapher who suggested that the tale be called “From Rags to Riches.”

Yet even those of us, who like, at times, to play the derisive urchin in the rear seats of the Church of the Gospel of Success, need not therefore be deaf to the rhythm of history in the story of one who came from the Bowery sidewalks to be the chief minstrel of his land and time. It was Mr. Kern—perhaps with visions of what choral singing and what stagecraft would be invited by the scenes in Battery Park, in Chinatown and on Broadway—who suggested that when at last the composer of the American opera sets out to catch his libretto, he might look further and fare worse than Berlin’s own story. For if that libretto is to be truly native, it will turn from the Indian maiden sitting lovelorn in the forest primeval. It will find its overtones in the hubbub of hope at Ellis Island, its rhythm in the sway of the

covered wagon, its climax in the thrust of the great frontier.

The tale of Berlin has a lilt in it for those who see it as a microcosm of this nation's history. If we keep green the memory of those gallant adventurers who first wrung a living from this resisting land, if there be a challenge for us still in the coming of the longboat that rescued the desperate settlement at Jamestown or in the gaze of the wondering priests who first sailed down the Mississippi,—well, here is a fresh reminder that the romance of America is an unfinished story. The life of Irving Berlin is a part of the American epic and the epic is still in the making.

Then it is hard to write the biography of a man who is only 36 years old as you reach your final chapter. You are troubled by what Philip Guedalla calls "the studied courtesy of a premature obituary," and there is always the plaguing notion that the subject of your narrative may, even as the presses are whirring with that final chapter, provide material for another one more eventful than all the rest.

Perhaps, after all, it will be decided in the perspective of fifty years that Irving Berlin was quite

unimportant. Perhaps not. And if not, why here—sketchy, tentative, unfinished—is a source book for the convenience of the wiser historian who will put the facts in permanent form.

Finally, it is never easy to tell the tale of one who, in time and space, lives just around the corner and may himself read the words that you have written. In the gruff diffidence which is the American tradition of human relations, I cannot freely set down for his embarrassed eyes all the good qualities of the head and of the heart which the neighbors of Irving Berlin know are an essential part of the full story. I am not free to put in words how deeply I honor the true and gentle American who was carried out of Russia by that refugee Rabbi and who served for a time the drinks and the songs at Nigger Mike's.

WORDS AND MUSIC BY IRVING BERLIN

1907-1909

THE BEST OF FRIENDS MUST PART

DORANDO

YIDDLE ON YOUR FIDDLE, PLAY SOME RAGTIME

THAT MESMERIZING MENDELSONN TUNE

IN COLLABORATION WITH

MARIE FROM SUNNY ITALY	M. NICHOLSON
QUEENIE	MAURICE ABRAHMS
SADIE SALOME—GO HOME	EDGAR LESLIE
JUST LIKE THE ROSE	AL PIANTADOSI
WE'LL WAIT, WAIT, WAIT	EDGAR LESLIE
GOODBYE GIRLIE	TED SNYDER
WILD CHERRIES	" "
NEXT TO YOUR MOTHER,	.
WHO DO YOU LOVE	" "
DO YOUR DUTY, DOCTOR	" "
SOME LITTLE SOMETHING	
ABOUT YOU	" "
STOP THAT RAG, KEEP ON	
PLAYING	" "
SOMEONE JUST LIKE YOU	
DEAR	" "
SWEET MARIE—MAKE-A-	
RAG - A - TIME - A - DANCE	
WITH ME	" "

226 Words and Music by Irving Berlin

IN COLLABORATION WITH

SHE WAS A DEAR LITTLE
GIRL

TED SNYDER

OH WHERE IS MY WIFE TO-
NIGHT

" "

NO ONE COULD DO IT LIKE
MY FATHER

" "

WISH THAT YOU WAS MY
GAL, MOLLY

" "

IF I THOUGHT YOU WOULDN'T
TELL

" "

I JUST CAME BACK TO SAY
GOODBYE

" "

CHRISTMAS TIME SEEMS
YEARS AND YEARS AWAY

" "

MY WIFE'S GONE TO THE
COUNTRY

WHITING & SNYDER

1910

STOP—STOP—STOP

CALL ME UP SOME RAINY AFTERNOON

YIDDISHA EYES

THAT KAZZATSKY DANCE

TRY IT ON YOUR PIANO

INNOCENT BESSIE BROWN

BEFORE I GO AND MARRY, I WILL HAVE A TALK WITH
YOU

ALEXANDER AND HIS CLARINET

SWEET ITALIAN LOVE

TED SNYDER

KISS ME MY HONEY, KISS

ME

" "

DREAMS, JUST DREAMS

" "

WHEN I HEAR YOU PLAY

THAT PIANO, BILL

" "

Words and Music by Irving Berlin 227

	IN COLLABORATION WITH
	TED SYNDER
WISHING	
THANK YOU, KIND SIR	" "
THAT BEAUTIFUL RAG	" "
PIANO MAN	" "
I LOVE YOU MORE EACH DAY	" "
I'M A HAPPY MARRIED MAN	" "
IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I CAN DO FOR YOU	" "
I'M GOING ON A LONG VACA- TION	" "
IF THE MANAGERS ONLY THOUGHT THE SAME AS MOTHER	" "
HERMAN, LET'S DANCE THAT BEAUTIFUL WALTZ	" "
DAT DRAGGY RAG	" "
DEAR MAYME, I LOVE YOU	" "
COLORED ROMEO	" "
BRING BACK MY LENA TO ME	" "
THE GRIZZLY BEAR	GEORGE BOTSFORD
OH, HOW THAT GERMAN COULD LOVE	SAM BERNARD
TELLING LIES	HENRIETTA BLANK & FRED E. BELCHER

1911-1912

ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND
EVERYBODY'S DOIN' IT NOW
THAT MYSTERIOUS RAG
THE RAGTIME VIOLIN
I BEG YOUR PARDON DEAR OLD BROADWAY

228 Words and Music by Irving Berlin

YIDDISHA NIGHTINGALE
YOU'VE GOT ME HYPNOTIZED
WHEN IT RAINS, SWEETHEART, WHEN IT RAINS
WHEN YOU'RE IN TOWN, IN MY HOME TOWN
WHISTLING RAG
WHEN YOU KISS AN ITALIAN GIRL
VIRGINIA LOU
RUN HOME AND TELL YOUR MOTHER
MY MELODY DREAM
MEET ME TONIGHT
THAT MONKEY TUNE
HOW DO YOU DO IT, MABEL, ON TWENTY DOLLARS A
WEEK
HE PROMISED ME
DAT'S-A MY GAL
THE DYING RAG
REAL GIRL
BRING ME A RING IN THE SPRING
BRING BACK MY LOVIN' MAN
BUSINESS IS BUSINESS, ROSEY COHEN
AFTER THE HONEYMOON

IN COLLABORATION WITH
VINCENT BRYANT

SPANISH LOVE
DOWN TO THE FOLIES
BERGÈRE

VINCENT BRYANT &
TED SNYDER

DON'T PUT OUT THE LIGHT
YANKEE LOVE
SOMBRERO LAND
ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING I GET LONESOME
DON'T TAKE YOUR BEAU TO
THE SEASHORE

EDGAR LESLIE
E. RAY GOETZ
“ “ “

TED SNYDER
E. RAY GOETZ

Words and Music by Irving Berlin 229

"ZIEGFELD FOLLIES"

EPHRAHAM PLAYED UPON THE PIANO
YOU'VE BUILT A FIRE DOWN IN MY HEART
DOGGONE THAT CHILLY MAN
WOODMAN, WOODMAN, SPARE THAT THREE (IN COL-
LABORATION WITH VINCENT BRYANT)

1913-1914

WHEN I LOST YOU
WHEN THAT MIDNIGHT CHOO CHOO LEAVES FOR
ALABAM
WHEN I'M ALONE I'M LONESOME
WHEN I'M THINKING OF YOU
WHEN JOHNSON'S QUARTETTE HARMONIZES
A TRUE BORN SOLDIER MAN
THAT'S HOW I LOVE YOU
THAT SOCIETY BEAR
THE RAGTIME JOCKEY MAN
SPRING AND FALL
THE RAGTIME SOLDIER MAN
HANKY PANKY—OPERA BURLESQUE
MY SWEET ITALIAN MAN
I'VE GOT TO HAVE SOME LOVIN' MAN
A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING
KEEP AWAY FROM THE FELLOW WHO OWNS AN AUTO-
MOBILE
HE PLAYED IT ON HIS FID-FID-FIDDLE-DE-DE
GOODY GOODY GOODY GOODY
THE ELEVATOR MAN—GOING UP, GOING UP, GOING UP
DO IT AGAIN
DOWN IN MY HEART
COME BACK TO ME—MY MELODY

230 Words and Music by Irving Berlin

I'M AFRAID, PRETTY MAID, I'M AFRAID
CALL AGAIN
BECKY JOINED A MUSICAL SHOW
ANTONIO
IF ALL THE GIRLS I KNEW WERE LIKE YOU
FOLLOW ME AROUND
THE YIDDISHA PROFESSOR
WAIT UNTIL YOUR DADDY COMES HOME
PICK, PICK, PICK ON THE MANDOLIN, ANTONIO

IN COLLABORATION WITH

I WANT TO BE IN DIXIE	TED SNYDER
TAKE A LITTLE TIP FROM	" "
FATHER	" "
THAT MYSTERIOUS RAG	" "
THE MILLION DOLLAR BALL	RAY GOETZ
LEAD ME TO THAT BEAUTI-	" "
FUL BAND	" "

1915-1916

THAT INTERNATIONAL RAG
IN MY HAREM
SNOOKY OOKUMS
PULLMAN PORTERS' PARADE
AT THE DEVIL'S BALL
SOMEBODY'S COMING TO MY HOUSE
YOU PICKED A BAD DAY OUT TO SAY GOODBYE
WE HAVE MUCH TO BE THANKFUL FOR
WELCOME HOME
THE APPLE TREE AND THE BUMBLE BEE
THE OLD MAIDS' BALL
SAN FRANCISCO BOUND
THE MONKEY DOODLE DO

Words and Music by Irving Berlin 231

KEEP ON WALKING
HAPPY LITTLE COUNTRY GIRL
HE'S SO GOOD TO ME
MY SWEET ITALIAN MAN
KISS YOUR SAILOR BOY GOODBYE
JAKE—JAKE
ANNA LIZA'S WEDDING DAY
THE SUN DODGERS—AT THE PICTURE SHOW
YOU'VE GOT YOUR MOTHER'S BIG BLUE EYES
TRA-LA-LA-LA
TAKE ME BACK
THEY'VE GOT ME DOIN' IT NOW
THERE'S A GIRL IN ARIZONA
THE KI-I-YOUDLING DOG
I WAS AWAITING AROUND
IF YOU DON'T WANT ME, WHY DO YOU HANG
AROUND
DOWN IN CHATTANOOGA

WATCH YOUR STEP

LEAD ME TO LOVE
WHAT IS LOVE
I'M A DANCING TEACHER NOW
THE MINSTREL PARADE
LET'S GO AROUND THE TOWN
THEY ALWAYS FOLLOW ME AROUND
SHOW US HOW TO DO THE FOX TROT
WHEN I DISCOVERED YOU
THE SYNCOPATED WALK
I LOVE TO HAVE THE BOYS AROUND ME
SETTLE DOWN IN A ONE HORSE TOWN
MOVE OVER
SIMPLE MELODY

232 Words and Music by Irving Berlin

1916

STOP, LOOK, LISTEN

THE GIRL ON THE MAGAZINE
I LOVE A PIANO
THAT HULA HULA
RAGTIME FINALE
WHEN I GET BACK TO THE U. S. A.
BLOW YOUR HORN
WHY DON'T THEY GIVE US A CHANCE
I LOVE TO DANCE
AND FATHER WANTED ME TO LEARN A TRADE
A PAIR OF ORDINARY COONS
WHEN I'M OUT WITH YOU
TAKE OFF A LITTLE BIT
TEACH ME HOW TO LOVE
THE LAW MUST BE OBEYED
STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!
SKATING SONG
EVERYTHING IN AMERICA IS RAGTIME

1917-1918

WHEN I LEAVE THE WORLD BEHIND
ARABY
MY BIRD OF PARADISE
WHEN IT'S NIGHTTIME DOWN IN DIXIELAND
I WANT TO GO BACK TO MICHIGAN
THIS IS THE LIFE
IF THAT'S YOUR IDEA OF A WONDERFUL TIME, TAKE ME
HOME
THE HAUNTED HOUSE
IF YOU DON'T WANT MY PEACHES, YOU BETTER STOP
SHAKING THE TREE

Words and Music by Irving Berlin 233

THEY'RE ON THEIR WAY TO MEXICO
ALONG CAME RUTH
STAY DOWN HERE WHERE YOU BELONG
IF I HAD YOU
GOD GAVE YOU TO ME
HE'S A DEVIL
I LOVE TO QUARREL WITH YOU
FOLLOW THE CROWD
IT ISN'T WHAT HE SAID, BUT THE WAY HE SAID IT
DADDY COME HOME
WHEN YOU'RE DOWN IN LOUISVILLE
ALWAYS TREAT HER LIKE A BABY
HE'S A RAG PICKER
THAT'S MY IDEA OF PARADISE
FURNISHING A HOME FOR TWO
MORNING EXERCISES
I'M GOING BACK TO THE FARM
SI'S BEEN DRINKING CIDER
WHILE THE BAND PLAYED AN AMERICAN RAG
I LOVE TO STAY AT HOME
THE VOICE OF BELGIUM
COHEN OWES ME NINETY-SEVEN DOLLARS

YIP, YIP, YAPHANK

OH, HOW I HATE TO GET UP IN THE MORNING
MANDY
KITCHEN POLICE
DING DONG
EVER SINCE I PUT ON A UNIFORM
DREAM ON, LITTLE SOLDIER MAN
RAGTIME RAZOR BRIGADE
IN THE Y. M. C. A.

234 Words and Music by Irving Berlin

1919

FOLLIES OF 1919

MANDY

A PRETTY GIRL IS LIKE A MELODY

YOU CANNOT MAKE YOUR SHIMMY SHAKE ON TEA
(IN COLLABORATION WITH RENNOLD WOOLF)

HAREM LIFE

BEVO

MY TAMBOURINE GIRL

I'M THE GUY WHO GUARDS THE HAREM

I'D RATHER SEE A MINSTREL SHOW

A SYNCOPATED COCKTAIL

POPULAR NUMBERS

NOBODY KNOWS AND NOBODY SEEMS TO CARE

YOU'D BE SURPRISED

I'VE GOT MY CAPTAIN WORKING FOR ME NOW

THE HAND THAT ROCKED MY CRADLE RULES MY HEART

THE NEW MOON

SWEETER THAN SUGAR (IS MY SWEETIE)

I LOST MY HEART IN DIXIELAND

EYES OF YOUTH

I LEFT MY DOOR OPEN AND MY DADDY WALKED OUT
WAS THERE EVER A PAL LIKE YOU

WHEN MY BABY SMILES

I NEVER KNEW (IN COLLABORATION WITH ELSIE JANIS)

EVERYTHING IS ROSY NOW FOR ROSIE (IN COLLABORA-
TION WITH GRANT CLARKE)

1920

FOLLIES OF 1920

TELL ME LITTLE GYPSY

GIRLS OF MY DREAMS

Words and Music by Irving Berlin 235

BELLS

CHINESE FIRECRACKERS

COME ALONG SEXTETTE

LEG OF NATIONS

✓ THE SYNCOPATED VAMP

POPULAR NUMBERS

I'LL SEE YOU IN C-U-B-A

HOME AGAIN BLUES (IN COLLABORATION WITH HARRY
AKST)

I WONDER

BEAUTIFUL FACES NEED BEAUTIFUL CLOTHES

AFTER YOU GET WHAT YOU WANT YOU DON'T WANT IT

BUT, SHE'S JUST A LITTLE BIT CRAZY

RELATIVES

LINDY

DROWSY HEAD (IN COLLABORATION WITH VAUGHN DE
LEATH)

1921

MUSIC BOX REVUE—No. 1

✓ SAY IT WITH MUSIC

EVERYBODY STEP

✓ THEY CALL IT DANCING

AT THE COURT AROUND THE CORNER

IN A COZY KITCHENETTE APARTMENT

BEHIND THE FAN

✓ THE SCHOOLHOUSE BLUES

MY LITTLE BOOK OF POETRY

LEGEND OF THE PEARLS

✓ TELL ME WITH A MELODY

I'M A DUMBBELL (NEVER COPYRIGHTED)

236 Words and Music by Irving Berlin

POPULAR NUMBERS

ALL BY MYSELF
I'M GONNA DO IT IF I LIKE IT
PASSION FLOWER
PICKANINNY MOSE
THERE'S A CORNER UP IN HEAVEN

1922

MUSIC BOX REVUE—No. 2

CRINOLINE DAYS
PACK UP YOUR SINS AND GO TO THE DEVIL
WILL SHE COME FROM THE EAST
LADY OF THE EVENING
TAKE A LITTLE WIFE
DIAMOND HORSE-SHOE
I'M LOOKING FOR A DADDY LONG LEGS
THE LITTLE RED LACQUER CAGE
PORCELAIN MAID
BRING ON THE PEPPER
MONTMARTRE
DANCE YOUR TROUBLES AWAY

POPULAR NUMBERS

SOME SUNNY DAY
HOMESICK

1923

MUSIC BOX REVUE—No. 3

AN ORANGE GROVE IN CALIFORNIA
THE WALTZ OF LONG AGO
LITTLE BUTTERFLY
CLIMBING UP THE SCALE
TELL ME A BEDTIME STORY

Words and Music by Irving Berlin 237

ONE GIRL

LEARN TO DO THE STRUT

MAID OF MESH

TOO MANY SWEETHEARTS

POPULAR NUMBERS

WHEN YOU WALKED OUT SOMEONE ELSE WALKED

RIGHT IN

TELL ALL THE FOLKS IN KENTUCKY

1924

MUSIC BOX REVUE—No. 4

TELL HER IN THE SPRINGTIME

IN THE SHADE OF A SHELTERING TREE

LISTENING

THE CALL OF THE SOUTH

UNLUCKY IN LOVE

ROCKABYE BABY

WHO

WHERE IS MY LITTLE OLD NEW YORK

TOKIO BLUES

DON'T SEND ME BACK TO PETROGRAD

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

BANDANNA BALL

I WANT TO BE A BALLET DANCER

SIXTEEN, SWEET SIXTEEN

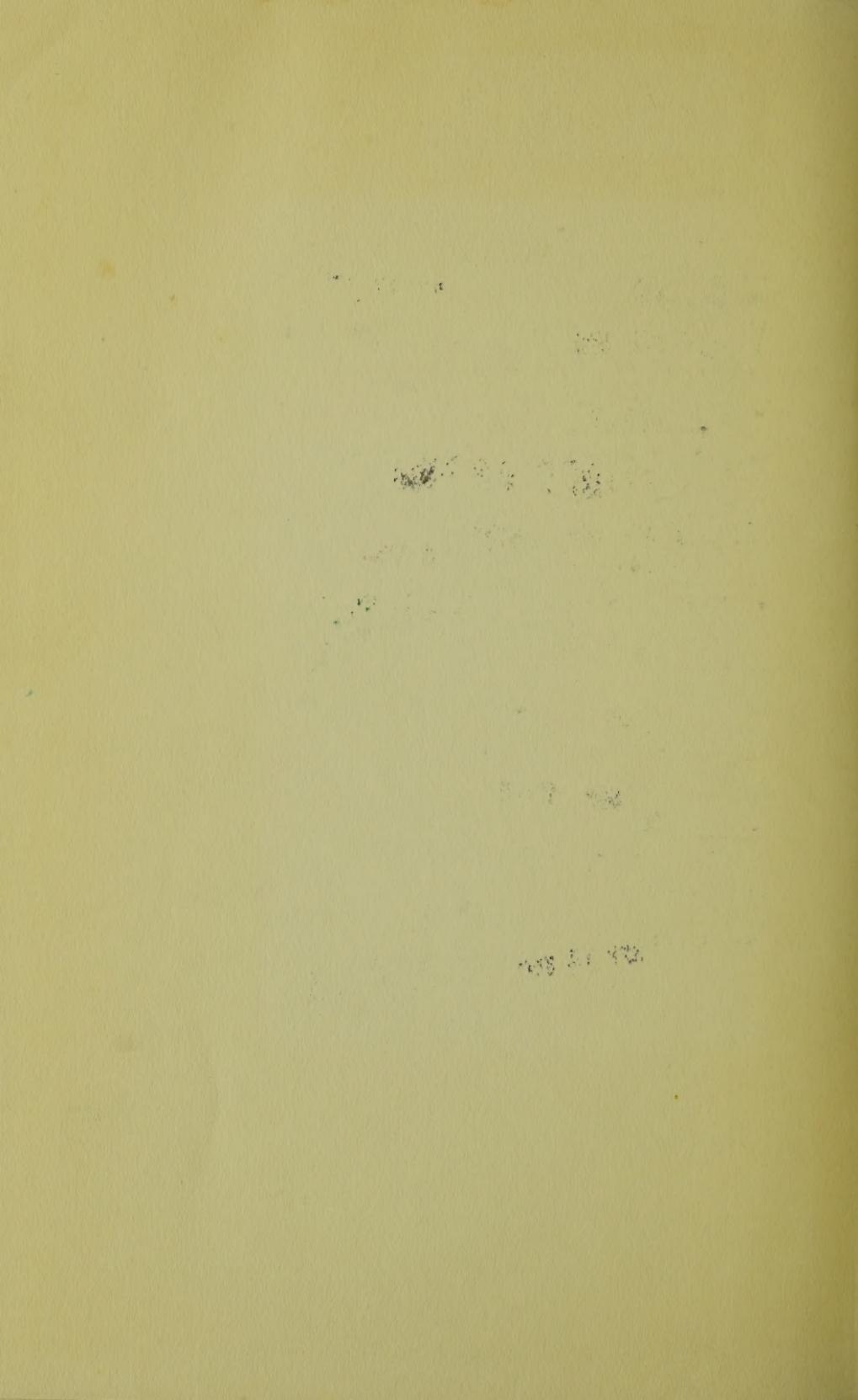
POPULAR NUMBERS

WHAT'LL I DO

LAZY

ALL ALONE

WE'LL ALL GO VOTING FOR AL





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DATE DUE

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